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AHMAD SHAH MASSOUD AND THE GENESIS OF THE NATIONALIST ANTI-COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN NORTHEASTERN AFGHANISTAN, 1969 - 1979

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ABSTRACT

Ahmad Shah Massoud and the Genesis of the Nationalist Anti-Communist Movement in Northeastern Afghanistan, 1969-1979.

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Between 1969 and December 1979 a nationalist, ethnically-Persian or *Tajik* opposition movement developed in Afghanistan in response to the increasing Soviet penetration of the country which had begun in 1955. The movement, emanating from the Panjsher Valley in northeastern Afghanistan and later known as the Northern Alliance, would demonstrate itself, after April 1980, to be the biggest threat to the Soviet occupation of the country.

While there are a number of studies dealing with the entire Soviet-Afghan war, little work has been done to document the progression of any single guerrilla front. This study seeks to fill this lacuna by exploring the origins of the foremost resistance movement and to remove some of the pervasive obscurity surrounding Afghanistan in the wake of the Soviet War.

The underlying thesis presented here is that, despite common perceptions about the centrality of Pashtuns in Afghan society, it was the Tajiks, a highly influential though little-understood minority group, and other allied Persian-speaking-nationalists, who caused the greatest military damage to the Communist regime in Afghanistan in 1978-1979, thereby contributing to the Soviet decision to intervene in December 1979. This study, by moving beyond the historically Pashtun-biased, English-language colonial literature on the country, is thus also applicable to an understanding of the full spectrum of Afghan history.

Acknowledgements

I wish to particularly acknowledge Sandy Gall, Peter Jouvenal and Richard McKenzie, who encouraged my early work and, through their diligent reporting, left key accounts of the development of the Panjsher front in the early and mid-1980s. Sandy, Peter and Richard were three of a small group of journalists, including Edward Giradet, who first questioned the inevitability of the Soviet absorption of Afghanistan. For this, like an earlier generation of reporters (which Sandy is also very much a part of) who first predicted the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, they deserve great credit.

My now longtime friends, the Hon. John Train and Cleo Paturis Farrel, formerly of the Afghanistan Relief Committee - an organization formed in 1980 by the living former U.S. Envoys to Afghanistan - offered me my first work experience in the field in the summer of 1987. The staff of the Hon. William McCollum provided briefings, encouragement and logistical support for my first visit to Pakistan and Afghanistan in 1989. I am grateful for both of these formative experiences.

In preparing for and undertaking this work, I was guided by a number of researchers, including, Prof. James McGregor Burns of Williams College, Prof. David Clinton of Tulane University, Prof. George Petrovich Ejov of Moscow State University, The Hon. Ravan Farhadi of the Afghan Foreign Ministry and formerly of Kabul University, Lt. Col. Lester Grau of the Foreign Military Studies Office, Prof. Robert W. July of New York University, Prof. Robert O'Neill of All Souls College, Oxford University, the late Prof. William L. Sherman of the University of Nebraska, Prof. Richard Strand of the University of Chicago and a former Fulbright Scholar, and Dr. Michael Warren, formerly of the Defense Intelligence Agency, with whom I studied at Tulane. Their collective and generous advice was invaluable.

During my two years of field research in Kabul and the Panjsher Valley, from September 1994 through October 1996, I was assisted by numerous individuals, far too many to recount here. I would especially like to thank the Hon. Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, Karl Bryan, John Burns, Fernand Dhondt, John Dixon, Nancy Hatch Dupree, Eng. Mohammad Es-Haq, Prof. Sabour Ferozan, Dr. John Hansen, Hasham Khan, Dr. Farid Hamayoun, Tim Johnston, Peter Jouvenal, Dr. Tom and Libby Little, Hafiz Mansur, Steve Masty, Maj. Graeme Membrey, Brig. Gen. Ahmad Muslim, Ismail Saadat, Abdul Satar, Amir Shah, Maj. Gen. Suhalia, Habib Shabuddine, Richard Smyth, Peter Stocker and Terrence White, who all

provided advice, support and friendship. United Press International enabled me to have a modest stringer's income and make periodic visits to New Delhi, while the International Committee of the Red Cross, the sole major international organization present in Kabul for much of the time I was there, provided critical transportation and communication support.

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Finally, I wish to acknowledge my mother, Suzanne B. deNeufville a former relief worker in ex-Yugoslavia. She heartily encouraged me to pursue this work, and in Kabul, on a couple of occasions, I took pride in explaining the "S. DENEUFVILLE" neatly stenciled inside my flak jacket. This work is dedicated to her.

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Note on Transliteration

Persian is a member of the Indo-Iranian language family and contains various consonant and vowel phonemes foreign to the English ear. For example, the "gh" sound in the word "Ghaus" also contains a subtle liquid "r" directly after the glottal "h," creating a sound combination nonexistent in English. The "ü" is transliterated for four different vowel sounds: "ou" as in "Massoud," "o" as is "koh," "u" as in "Nuristan," and "oo" as in "Majrooh." The complexity of these phonetics is often intimidating for English readers. The letters "v" and "w" are the same letter in the Arabic alphabet, pronounced "waw" or "vav," posing yet another complexity. Though Afghans, such as my friend, The Hon. Ravan Farhadi, prefer to pronounce the letter as "vav" (the common Iranian pronunciation), in cases such as Mohammad Anwar's name I have used the "waw" pattern (traditional in Afghanistan).

I have attempted to follow classical transliteration for Persian place names, while at the same time trying to present them in a way which English-speaking readers will find phonetically recognizable. Whenever possible, I have used common spellings for place names such as Nuristan. In the case of well-known figures I have relied on spellings used by The New York Times, and for earlier periods those included in Louis Dupree's Afghanistan. I

hope that scholars of Persian languages will be tolerant of these inconsistencies, recognizing my attempt at accessibility for a broad audience.

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Introduction

This work grew out of a desire to understand how it was that the Soviet military, with its sophisticated armour and air power, came to be defeated by an Afghan ethnic minority widely assumed, even in its own poor country, to be insignificant.[1] The events of September 11, 2001 (hereafter, 9/11) have brought into clearer focus the need to understand this question, as they have highlighted the West's ongoing misunderstanding of it.[2]

In order to answer this question one must go beyond geopolitics and examine the social history of men and women who, following Afghanistan's first Communist-led

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[1] Writing in 1809, Mountstuart Elphinstone, recounting what was told to him, wrote that in the period ever since the Arab invasion of Afghanistan in the first Islamic century, the Pashtuns "have reduced the Tajiks to a state of entire dependency except in one or two strong counties," Elphinstone, An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul (Karachi: Oxford University Press, reprinted 1972), p. 406. Contrast this statement with the description of the upland Tajiks or Kohistanis he relates just three pages later in the same study: "In their personal character, they are bold, violent, and unruly; and so much given to war that they reckon it is a disgrace for a man to die in his bed; They are excellent infantry, particularly among the hills," p. 409. While undoubtedly both accounts were related to Elphinstone with similar conviction, the first, though in some ways perhaps technically accurate, bears far less consistency with the events of the last two centuries, including especially the 1980s, than does the second. Why the inconsistency? Olivier Roy asks a similar question about the obscurity of the Tajiks in his 1985 study, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pointing out that "For the majority of Afghan and western historians," the January 1929 seizure of power by the Tajik leader Habibullah Kalakani "represents a bizarre episode, an interruption in the course of traditional politics," p. 66. Rather than providing a cogent answer to this question, however, Roy continues directly with a complex thesis - perhaps intended in part to befuddle Soviet analysts - making the esoteric point that Habibullah and the Tajiks in this inexplicable aberration, "benefited not from the moral support of the ulama in the north, but from their actively backing his cause in their preaching, particularly in the Naqshbandi areas," pp. 66-67.

[2] For the best post-9/11/01 study on Afghanistan see Steve Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001 (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004). Thomas Kean, chairman of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (known as the 9/11 Commission), said in an exchange with Samuel Berger during a commission hearing that Coll's book "confirms a lot of what we're finding out in this investigation. I'd recommend it."

coup in July 1973, eventually chose to fight.[3] As such this dissertation is a history from below of how upland farmers, artisans and labourers banded together with distinguished military officers and foreign-trained doctors and engineers, often enduring snow, high mountains and other hardships in pursuit of the nation's freedom from Soviet dominance. The ultimate defeat of the Soviets in northeastern Afghanistan resulted from the efforts of an entire cadre of men, driven by history, local geography, education and culture.[4]

Few Westerners appreciate the significance of the Panjsher Valley resistance movement and its role in the events leading to the Soviet decision to invade and occupy Afghanistan. One who does is the French political

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[3] The first Communist coup, which took place on 17 July 1973, was accomplished, according to British diplomat Martin Ewans, "by a few hundred troops, led by a handful of officers." Ewans adds that "Daoud seems to have relied on Karmal and the [Communists] who in the early 1970s had begun to recruit supporters from among the officers corps," Ewans, Afghanistan: A New History (Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 2001), p. 130. Louis Dupree points out that Daoud, in his first tenure as Prime Minister, 1953-1963, had "crushed opposition as it rose, and made no pretense of returning to the days of the 'liberal parliament'" when he returned to power in 1973, Louis Dupree, Afghanistan (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 499. Thus his open alliance after 1973 with the Communists, combined with his chauvinistic Pashtun sentiments made him and his Communist allies a natural opponent of the nationalist opposition movement that eventually sparked the Panjsher Rebellion.

[4] For the central role of Persinate culture in Afghan history see Vartan Gregorian, The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946 (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1969) and Christine Noelle, State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan (1826-1863) (Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 1997). The significance of the geography of the Panjsher, central to the success of the anti-Soviet Tajik movement, and the general importance of routes in Central Asian history, including in the 1980s, is the topic of Mahnaz Z. Ispahani's Roads and Rivals (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989). The important role of education in Ahmad Shah Massoud's family and Panjsheri culture in general is covered in Chapter 6 of Coll, Ghost Wars. The cohesive mercantile and non-tribal nature of Tajik society, and Jamiat-i-Islami in particular, is the subject of Chapter 4 of Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan.

scientist Olivier Roy, whose work Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, published in 1985 immediately after the height of the Soviet War, accurately credits the role played by the Persian-speaking Afghans.[5]

A number of secondary works and academic studies address communism, Islamism and the Soviet War in Afghanistan.[6] In particular, some literature has addressed the general phenomenon of the Panjsher resistance and the role played by Ahmad Shah Massoud following the December 1979 intervention.[7] In contrast, there is no English literature on the development of the Panjsher front *prior* to the Soviet intervention.[8] This thesis will attempt to fill that gap in the scholarship

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[5] To highlight the contrast he saw between the Persian nationalists and the radical Pashtuns, Roy describes the philosophy adopted by the leader of the latter group as being "homogenous and disciplined, which was not far removed from that of Lenin," Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 78, while he describes the former as "a dominant party which has renounced its quintessential [fundamentalist] character to absorb people who are not ideologically committed from the very beginning," p. 120. While the Panjsheris comprised the largest Persian front, they were but one of dozens of such Farsi-speaking groups. See George Crile, Charlie Wilson's War (New York: Grove Press, 2003) for a discussion of the British MI6's success in recognizing the importance of the Panjsher Valley front before other Western intelligence agencies.

[6] For a classical study of the development of communism in Afghanistan see Anthony Arnold, Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism: Parcham and Khalq (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1983). Roy's Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan is perhaps the best study on the role of Islam, though a recent work by David Edwards, Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), has contributed to an understanding of the war's origins, in particular the key role played by traditional leaders - something that Roy, again perhaps for ideological or tactical reasons, suppresses. Mark Urban's War in Afghanistan (London: Macmillan, 1988) is perhaps the best overview of the war's development from a military standpoint. For a more detailed discussion see "Sources" section of introduction.

[7] See Hafiz Mansur, Diary of Jihad (Kabul: Jamiat Islami Political Office, 1991), translated and edited by Ferozan and deNeufville, 1994; Sandy Gall, Behind Russian Lines: An Afghan Journal (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983); Edward Girardet, Afghanistan: The Soviet War (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985); and Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan.

[8] As is mentioned later in the introduction, Mansur's work Diary of Jihad is the only book covering the 1979 rebellion.

by examining the growth of what became the most significant anti-Communist front of the Soviet-Afghan War.

The years 1980-1983, immediately following the 1979 uprising highlighted in this thesis, have been acknowledged as the most important in the effort to defeat the Communist, and in particular the Soviet, forces in Afghanistan.[9] Notwithstanding the shrill tone of Pakistani-based opposition leaders in the late 1980s - or the steady increase in U.S. aid to Afghan rebels after 1984 - for the war in the northeast the early 1980s were by far the most pivotal time.[10] The accounts presented here are those of individuals who were inside Afghanistan during this period, far removed from the public relations campaigns being waged by Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence, the American Central Intelligence Agency

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[9] With the Fortieth Army's losses on the main highway mounting and their key airbase at Bagram threatened by attack, the Soviets in January 1983 signed a ceasefire protocol. As Urban writes, "The pattern of operations by the Limited Contingent of Soviet Forces in Afghanistan had, since 1980, been dictated by the need to secure certain key roads - in particular, Highway 2 (i.e. the Salang Highway) from the Soviet border across the Salang pass to Kabul. The aim of preventing attacks on this road had triggered six offensives against the Panjsher, and now it prompted a remarkable cease-fire," Urban, War in Afghanistan, p. 118. Although the ceasefire lasted just several months into 1984, it gave Massoud time to unify Tajik resistance forces across northeastern Afghanistan. Also see Louis Dupree, "Afghanistan in 1982: Still No Solution," Asian Survey vol. 23, no. 2 (1983), pp. 133-142.

[10] In August 1983, Clarence Long, chairman of the American House of Representatives Appropriations Sub-committee on Government Operations, visited Pakistan at the behest of Representative Charles Wilson and initiated the dramatic increases in aid that would result in the Afghan war becoming known as "Charlie Wilson's War." See Crile, Charlie Wilson's War, pp. 174-193, for a detailed account of Long's visit to Pakistan. Following the trip, Wilson secured a $40 million appropriation secretly earmarked for anti-aircraft cannons for the Afghan resistance. According to Crile, the amount was $10 million more than the entire U.S. contribution to the covert Afghan program in 1982, Crile, Charlie Wilson's War, p. 216.

and others beyond Afghanistan's borders.[11] More specifically, the halt in hostilities by the occupying forces within 36 months of their arrival indicates that the fighting in the Northeast was far more important than was previously acknowledged by various Pakistani-based and, of course, Soviet sources.[12]

The 1979 Rebellion

In May 1979, a 27-year old anti-Communist militant leader named Ahmad Shah, who for security reasons had adopted the *nom de guerre* Massoud, returned from five years of exile in Pakistan to his native Panjsher Valley, with twenty-five fighters.[13] There, in the territory that intersects the USSR's main supply route through the Salang Pass to Kabul and the many overland crossings from Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province, the militants aligned themselves with the region's traditional leaders, or khans, and began plotting an uprising.[14] In little

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[11] For a detailed discussion of the ISI's efforts to promote the radical Pashtun-Afghan groups at the expense of the single Tajik front, see Coll, Ghost Wars.

[12] See, for example, Mohammad Yousaf, Afghanistan the Bear Trap: The Defeat of a Superpower (Havertown, Pennsylvania: Casemate, 2001) and Boris Gromov, Limited Contingent (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1993).

[13] Mansur in Diary of Jihad recounts a list of the key figures of this group and the munitions they carried, pp. 3-4. He explains how "The Mujahiddin entered the Panjsher Valley two groups in the half of Jawza month. The first group went directly to Safid Chihr and established their headquarters there, and the second group settled in the Dahane Rewat vicinity. The groups, relying on their experience from the 29th of Saratan uprising against Daoud, did not conduct any military actions until the Asad month of the same year, but they convened gatherings there to direct the awareness of the people toward Jihad," p. 5.

[14] Noelle writes of Kohistan, the region adjoining Kabul to the north: "Its overwhelmingly Tajik population had successfully evaded government control until the beginning of the nineteenth century. While some parts of Kohistan were held as a jagir by individuals

over a month the Panjsher was in rebellion and the Salang highway had been severed, leaving the tottering Communist government briefly cut off from its Soviet patron.[15] A confidential U.S. government cable shortly thereafter concluded that the resulting reorganization of the "embattled" Afghan regime's cabinet was "inadequate to pacify the growing domestic opposition."[16]

The 1979 Panjsher Rebellion was quite similar in its development to earlier rebellions in 1978-79 in Nuristan and Herat, which were also led by nationalists and Persian speakers, and which are dealt with in this study. The long-term significance of the Panjsher uprising,

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favored by the royal court, the remaining districts yielded no revenue to speak of," State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan, p. 30. It was the descendents of these Tajik leaders who in August 1839 briefly seized the capital in advance of the arrival of British forces, escorting the former Shah, Shuja, back to Kabul, p. 31. They were again to hold the capital for most of 1929 and also 1993-1996, until the Taliban seizure of Kabul. See R.D. McChesney, Kabul Under Siege: Fayz Muhammad's Account of the 1929 Uprising (Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999) and Ahmed Rashid, Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2001).

[15] Gust Avrakotos, the CIA official who became responsible for the entire covert funding program for the Afghan resistance, later acknowledged that "Geographically, [the Panjsher] was the key," Crile, Charlie Wilson's War, p. 197. Ispahani writes, "The significant events that led to the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan - the legacy of the Great Game, the making of the Durand Line, and the Afghani-Pakistani quarrel over the future 'state' of Pakhtunistan - were all caught up in the web of Central and South Asian routes," Ispahani, Roads and Rivals, p. 84. Television journalist Sandy Gall, in his book about a harrowing reporting trip to Afghanistan in 1982, writes that "The Salang Tunnel was a vitally important supply route and knowing this, the Russians guarded it well, patrolling the area with helicopter gunships," Gall, Behind Russian Lines: An Afghan Journal, p. 124.

[16] Bruce J. Amstutz, confidential cable, U.S. Embassy, Kabul, to U.S. State Department, 30 July 1979, from National Security Archive collection, "Afghanistan: The Making of U.S. Policy, 1973-1990." A cable in September mentioned the success of the guerrilla strategy of cutting the Salang Highway, "indicating a growing military sophistication on the part of the anti-regime forces which probably surpassed the skill normally associated with mountain villagers," Bruce J. Amstutz, confidential cable, U.S. Embassy, Kabul, to U.S. State Department, 6 September 1979, No. 06697, Section 02 of 03 0612072, from National Security Archive collection, "Afghanistan: The Making of U.S. Policy, 1973-1990."

however, was dramatically different. The Nuristani rebellion, which occurred in Kunar Province on the border of Pakistan and helped inspire the Panjsher rising, was an embarrassment for the Communists but was not in itself a strategic threat to the Kabul regime.[17] The same holds true for revolts in early 1979 in Herat, Nangahar and Paktia Provinces.[18] In contrast, the Panjsher Rebellion quickly came to pose a serious security threat to the Communist regime that, as will be shown in this study, both influenced the June 1979 decision of the Soviet Central Committee's to address the crisis and led to a shakeup in the Afghan Defence Ministry, furthering the schism between Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin and President Nur Taraki and directly contributing to the

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[17] Edwards writes that "A widow who had refused to leave Ningalam when the other residents fled was burned alive in her house with her child" and that Wakil, a principal figure in the Kunar uprising, "was among those who had heard the story of the burning of Ningalam and the killing of the woman and her child, and he told me that the incident hardened his resolve to leave Kabul and return to Pech, which he did the following winter," Edwards, Before Taliban, p. 128. In other words, this key leader of the Kunar rebellion became involved not because of any overarching strategic reasons, but because he believed that there were humanitarian reasons for resistance. Richard Strand writes that the Nuristanis "were the first citizens of Afghanistan to successfully revolt against the Communist overthrow of their government in 1978. Their success inspired others throughout the country to rise up and bleed the Soviet Union to death through thirteen years of war," Nuristan: Hidden Land of the Hindu-Kush, interviews of Anwar by Richard Strand and Peter deNeufville, Sedora.net, 1997-2003, p. 2. Earlier in their history, Strand writes, the Nuristanis had resisted Islam as it spread eastward, but in 1895-96 they were conquered by the Afghan armies of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan and were forced to convert to Islam. Also see Schuyler Jones, Men of Influence in Nuristan (London: Seminar Press, 1974), pp. 2-20. Certainly the events in the peripheral region of Nuristan had a profound impact on the leaders of the Panjsher Rebellion.

[18] A cable on September 6 from the U.S. embassy in Afghanistan to the State Department noted that "Paktia and the south to continue to simmer," implying their insignificance to the security of the capital and thus the non-strategic nature of the areas for the Soviets. Bruce J. Amstutz, confidential cable, U.S. Embassy, Kabul, to U.S. State Department, 6 September 1979, No. 06697, from National Security Archive collection, "Afghanistan: The Making of U.S. Policy, 1973-1990."

Soviet decision in early December 1979 to intervene.[19]

The battles in the Panjsher were to intensify following the Red Army's arrival in the country. Eventually, the Soviet failure to stem the insurgency would tip the balance of power in Afghanistan's critical northeast quadrant away from the Communists and their Soviet backers. "By the time he repelled his sixth Soviet offensive, in 1982, Massoud had made a name for himself nationwide," Steve Coll writes in Ghost Wars. "He was the 'Lion of the Panjsher.' The word *Panjsher* itself had become a rallying cry across Afghanistan and abroad, a symbol of hope for the anticommunist resistance."[20] For these reasons, the 1979 Panjsher Rebellion, and the development of the nationalist-Islamic movement that led to it, in many regards marked the genesis of the Soviet Fortieth Army's defeat. Although a 2001 Wall Street Journal article may have been hyperbolic in calling Massoud "The Afghan who won the Cold War," his role in the history of the Soviet-Afghan war was clearly key. Amusingly, a senior CIA official, Gust Avrakotos, would later take credit for making "it possible for Massoud to recognize his greatness;" the claim is somewhat absurd, considering that the Tajik leader had fought his two most important battles, both in 1982,

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[19]A cabinet shake-up, reported the day after the announcement of his new appointment (as minister of defence), was described as being "on Amin's initiative," Arnold, Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism, p. 87.

[20]Coll, Ghost Wars, p. 117.

several months *before* Avrakotos' assignment to head the Directorate of Operations Afghan desk.[21]

By the time of the 1988 signing of the Geneva Accords, providing for the USSR's withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Tajik organization's authority stretched across much of seven provinces and was a significant presence in five others.[22] Later, following the Islamic Revolution of April 1992, it was this same group of men who installed their political party's leader, Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, as president of Afghanistan, and remained in power for almost four and a half years until the September 1996 Taliban takeover of Kabul.[23]

Key Figures

The leaders of the Panjsher front, a mix of students from Kabul's top educational institutions and rural traditional leaders of the Panjsher, were the elite of a little-understood Persian ethnic group, broadly known as

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[21] Robert Kaplan eulogized Massoud in an article entitled "The Afghan Who Won the Cold War," Wall Street Journal, September 19, 2001. Crile, Charlie Wilson's War, p. 195. The Soviets' fifth and sixth offensives in the Panjsher took place prior to Avrakotos' joining the Afghan program in mid-1983, Crile, Charlie Wilson's War, p. 154.

[22] By 1986 Jamiat controlled the majority of Parwan, Kapisa, Kunduz, Badakhshan and Takhar Provinces in the east, and the western provinces of Herat and Farah. The organization also had a significant presence in sections of Baglan, Kunar, and Laghman Provinces in the east, and Nimroz and Helmand Provinces in the west and south. For more on the Geneva Accords see Diego Cordovez and Selig Harrison, Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[23] For a description of the Taliban takeover of Kabul see Coll, Ghost Wars, pp. 332-333. Ewans, Afghanistan, Chapter 18, "Enter the Taliban," offers a broader view of the event.

Tajiks.[24] This faction had played a critical, though little-known, role in Afghanistan's development over the previous two-and-a-quarter centuries, as is described in the first half of Chapter 1.[25] By 1979, following twenty-four years of intense Pashtun nationalism driven by the personal ambitions of the left-leaning Prince Daoud, these men were determined to restore Afghanistan to the more Persian-centric position it had known since the 1776 transfer of the capital to Kabul.[26]

Ironically, as much as any other factor, it had been the hostility of American diplomats towards Afghanistan following World War II that had led to the Soviet entry into the country in 1955.[27] The history of how this relatively unknown faction came to play a dominant role in the modern Afghan state, and how short-sighted U.S. diplomacy was to lead directly to the events of the 1980s, are also examined here.

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[24]In his classic 1809 study of the country, Mountstuart Elphinstone described the Tajiks as a people "to excite a degree of curiosity, which my information is ill calculated to remove. The Tajiks are not united into one body, like most other nations, or confined to one country, but are scattered unconnected through a great part of [Central] Asia," Elphinstone, An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul, p. 403.

[25]This is the focus of Chapter 1. Noelle's State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan and R.D. McChesney's Kabul Under Siege further discuss this period.

[26]For examples of the Pashtun chauvinism demonstrated by the Khalq regime see Arnold, Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism.

[27]In Afghanistan: Highway of Conquest, Arnold Fletcher writes: "It was to an Afghanistan angry with the United States, dissatisfied with its own economic progress, and alarmed over the situation east of the Durand Line, that Nikita Khrushchev came in November 1956, arriving in Kabul on the last lap of his celebrated tour," p. 269. See also Ludwig W. Adamec, Afghanistan's Foreign Affairs to the Mid-20th Century: Relations With the USSR, Germany, and Britain (Tucson, Arizona: The University of Arizona Press, 1974) and Leon B. Poullada and Leila D.J. Poullada, The Kingdom of Afghanistan and the United States: 1828-1973 (Omaha, Nebraska: The Centre for Afghanistan Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and Dageforde Publishing, 1995).

The town of Bazarak, at the centre of the Panjsher Valley, became the focal point of much of the drama of late 1979 and the early 1980s. Home to some 500 families, it is the second-largest town in the lower Panjsher and the fourth largest in the entire valley. It is bisected by the Panjsher River, the banks of which are dotted with overhanging mulberry trees. Most of the houses are of adobe construction, though since the war the wealthier men in the town have built houses and a new mosque from stones quarried in the adjoining side valleys. The town is made up of three principal areas, each with its own predominant clans. They are known as: Bazarak (including the Parande Valley which runs north to the Andarab Valley), Manjahor (on the far side of the river which runs south to the Tagab Valley), and Jangalak (on an arid knoll overlooking a prominent flood plain just north of the town).[28]

From this last place, a young man named Dost Mohammad, the son of a prominent courtier of Amir Habibullah, began a military career and married, as his second wife, the learned daughter of a lawyer from the neighbouring Panjsheri town of Rukha. Together the couple had four children, the oldest of whom, Ahmad Shah, proved from a very young age to possess remarkable

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[28] This author spent significant time in Parande and Jangalak in June 1994-July 1996. The flood plain, known as Maidon-i-Shahi, or Field of the Kings, is where earlier rulers of the country came to watch annual buzkashi matches. See Whitney G. Azoy, Buzkashi: Game and Power in Afghanistan (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

rhetorical and organizational gifts.[29] As a teenager, Ahmad Shah, with encouragement from Dost Mohammad, took a keen interest in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, sitting with his father late into the evening listening to the British Broadcasting Corporation's reports of the battles. Later, as an engineering student at the Soviet-run Polytechnic, Ahmad Shah joined the anti-Soviet Islamic movement, which was formally established at Kabul University in 1969. He was to become one of the most popular, best connected, and, following Prince Daoud's coup in 1973, longest surviving of the early leaders of the nationalist wing of that organization. In 1974 Ahmad Shah, still in his early twenties, and several dozen militants fled to Pakistan. It was with this experience that the former university activist and member of the traditional Tajik bureaucratic elite, Ahmad Shah, employing the code name Massoud, returned to the Panjsher with 25 men in May 1979 with the intention of overthrowing the second Communist

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[29] By age 11 Massoud was organizing war games among the boys in his neighborhood and he later tutored classmates in math, Coll, Ghost Wars, pp. 107-109. Also see Gall, Behind Russian Lines, and this author's interview with Ahmad Zia, February 1992. Roy discusses the sequence of leadership of the Islamic Youth — "The four [successive] leaders of the youth movement, Abdurraman Niyazi, Engineer Habiburrahman, Mawlawi Habiburrahman and Gulbuddine Hekmatyar (the only survivor after 1975)" — and notes that "the radical students, especially the Pashtun, were pro-Hekmatyar," Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, pp. 73, 77. Edwards writes that "Beginning in the early 1970s, the halcyon atmosphere of the first period of political activity evaporated and was replaced by a situation that was a great deal more tense and fractured." The first reason for this change was certainly the unexpected death, reportedly from leukemia, in 1970 of Abdur Rahim Niazi, the charismatic leader of the Muslim Youth. While a number of other students were as actively committed to the movement as Niazi, "none commanded the respect that he enjoyed," Edwards, Before Taliban, p. 207.

government, which had come to power in April 1978.[30]

The Obscurity of the Tajiks

Little research has been done on Afghanistan's Persian-speaking partisans largely because prior to 9/11, few researchers were trained in the Persian language, willing to endure the significant hardships needed to record the story, and in particular, suspicious of the traditional colonial analyses of the Afghan nation. Those British works, primarily written from within the safety of India's (now Pakistan's) North-West Frontier Province, viewed Afghanistan through the prism of the Ghilzai Pashtun, who populated that region.[31] In such an environment it was easy to conclude that Afghanistan was a Pashtun state, and therefore, whatever the non-Pashtun Afghans did was of little significance.[32] Even in 1995, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the

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[30] See Mansur, Diary of Jihad, pp. 5-7.

[31] Books such as Olaf Caroe's The Pathans (London: Macmillan & Co., 1958) and William Kerr Fraser-Tytler's Afghanistan: A Study of Political Developments in Central and Southern Asia (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), which primarily focused on the Pathan, or Pashtun, tribes, have for decades been offered by specialists as "the leading works on Afghanistan." More recent analysts such as Howard Hart, CIA station chief in Islamabad during the first three years of the Soviet occupation, lapped up Pakistani myths about Afghanistan. Hart told an interviewer that "The Afghans are hardly a people, much less a nation," Crile, Charlie Wilson's War, pp. 224-225. It is a seemingly odd statement in reference to a people that has remained nationally connected within a single state for over 250 years.

[32] For the importance of non-Pashtuns in the inception of the resistance, see Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, pp. 54-83; also Edwards, Before Taliban, especially pp. 95-166 and pp. 225-278. Edwards also highlights the role of Persian-oriented individuals such as Faizani, Samiullah Safi and Abdur Rahim Niazi in the development of the nationalist movement. Dupree gruffly writes that "Habibullah (called Bacha Saqqao, 'Son of a Water-carrier'), a non-literate Tajik who controlled Kohistan, entered Kabul, deposed Amanullah, and ruled Afghanistan for nine bloody months," Dupree, Afghanistan, p. 452.

accomplishments of Massoud's resistance movement had started to become increasingly appreciated, a senior United Nations official, holding forth from a well-fortified Afghan Prgramme office within Pakistan, was still able to disparage the Panjsher as "an insignificant gorge."[33]

In the twenty-five years that have passed since the 1979 Panjsher Rebellion, the challenge, as William Royce, the distinguished U.S. government expert on Afghanistan, has pointed out, is "to understand what was different about the water in the Panjsher."[34] To truly accomplish this task it is necessary to transcend what historian John Gaddis describes as "the principle of diminishing relevance,"[35] or the deleterious tendency to ignore the distant past, and go back to the beginning of modern Afghan history.

Afghanistan's 1747 so-called "confederation," rather than being a domestic event, was the result of the fracture of Shah Nadir Kuli Khan's Persian empire along Sunni-Shiite lines following his assassination.[36] Two key nineteenth-century Afghan Amirs, Dost Mohammad (1826-

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[33] Interview with the author, July 1995. This United Nations official from East Africa was indignant that the people from "one gorge," as he repeated, had come to rule an entire state.

[34] Author interview with Royce 29 January 2003.

[35] Or in his words, "the greater the time that separates a cause from a consequence, the less relevant we presume that cause to be," John Lewis Gaddis, The Landscape of History (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 96, emphasis added. As Gaddis points out there, the lag time between cause and effect can be dramatic: "The Japanese government could hardly have decided to attack the United States if the Japanese islands had never surfaced."

[36] See Willem Vogelsang, The Afghans (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), p. 227,and Noelle, State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan.

1839; 1843-1863) and his grandson, Abdur Rahman (1880-1901), were half Qizilbash-Persian and on three successive occasions came to power with the support of the country's Persian minority living north of Kabul in the Shamali or *Northern* Plain and Panjsher Valley.[37] The dynasty remained in power until January 14, 1929, when the last member of that ruling house attempted to arrest a key Tajik leader, Habibullah Kalakani, who at the time held sway in the Shamali Plain and Panjsher Valley.[38] Kalakani deposed the Amir and, though he remained in power for only nine months, the event, much like the anti-Soviet resistance of the early 1980s, demonstrated the central role in the Afghan state of the secularly-organized, mobile, and learned Tajik minority. Because of the central relationship of this group, the Tajiks, the Qizilbash, non-Pashtun Persian speakers in both the east and west of the country, and Persianized Pashtuns, I have referred to the group collectively as "Persians," and have referred to a collective "Persianate-Afghan" national culture.[39]

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[37] For a discussion of the conquest of Turkistan and the role of the Northern Army, see Noelle, State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan, pp. 60-122.

[38] McChesney in Kabul Under Siege provides an account of the nine-month Tajik government under Habibullah Kalakani, January-November 1929. An earlier Afghan shah, Mahmoud was similarly deposed.

[39] While numerous ethnic labels are used to describe Persian-speaking or Farsiban Afghans, this thesis employs the terms *Persian*, and *Persianate*. The purpose is to identify a common denominator for the numerous sub-groups that contributed to the national movement documented in this work. These include Panjsheri Tajiks, such as Massoud's cadre; Shamali Tajiks; Quizilbash; individuals such as Rabbani, who, at least in contemporary Dari, is often called a *Badakhshi* (in contrast to the Tajiks of Takhar); western non-Pashtuns like Ismail Khan, who are known as *Farsiaban*, never Tajik;

To an entire generation of Soviet fighting men, Afghanistan's Panjsher Valley and its Tajik inhabitants became synonymous with death and the defiance of the Afghan people in the face of Communism and the USSR's intervention in their country.[40] The guerrillas' strategy was to cut off the supply routes connecting Kabul with the USSR, particularly the Salang Highway, the main north-south artery through the Hindu Kush mountains.[41]

Methodically, Ahmad Shah Massoud divided the valley into military districts, assigning commands to his most daring and talented leaders. From these defensive units, fighters were selected for elite mobile groups known as "mutaharek."[42] Between April 1980 and September 1982, the USSR launched six progressively more sophisticated offensive operations into the strategic valley, in an attempt to secure the Salang. The last of these six attacks, in September 1982, was witnessed by a British television network correspondent and his four-man crew. Their reporting on that battle, including two full-length

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and the urban Durrani such as Zahir Shah and Hamid Karzai, who are culturally and linguistically Persian, despite their Pashtun lineage.

[40] The 1983 French documentary film A Valley Against an Empire – shot and directed by Christophe de Ponfilly, about Massoud and the Mujahedin resistance – was indicative of this almost mystical perception that developed in the 1980s.

[41] The two major passes through these mountains are Shibar and Salang. As Dupree writes, "No motorable road went through the Hindu Kush until the reign of King Mohammad Nadir Shah (1929-33), when the Afghans completed a long-time dream by building a road which traveled circuitously via Shibar Pass through the Hindu Kush," Dupree, Afghanistan, p. 10. Urban points out that ten days before the Soviet intervention, soldiers from the 103rd Guards were deployed from Bagram to protect the Salang Pass, Urban, War in Afghanistan, p. 44.

[42] Roy translates this as "mobile or a mobile group," Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 225.

books, confirmed what over a dozen independent reporters and European intelligence services already suspected: the Soviets could not stem the strategically-located Panjsher opposition.[43]

Starting with two dozen men in May 1979, by 1984 Massoud commanded a standing army of several thousand, with hundreds of thousands of active supporters across five key provinces of northeastern Afghanistan.[44] The expanded organization's activities - controlling the intersection between the Soviets' strategic north-south corridor from Central Asia to Kabul and the guerrillas' east-west supply routes from Pakistan, which were burgeoning as a result of the efforts of a young, east-Texas congressman, Charlie Wilson - soon sealed the fate of the Soviet occupation of the country.[45] Despite two major offensive operations into the Panjsher Valley in 1984, by 1985 Soviet negotiators had begun hammering out the terms of a treaty, known as the Geneva Accords, which

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[43] ITN anchorman Sandy Gall travelled to the Panjsher in the summer of 1982 with cameraman Charles Morgan, television news editor Nigel Ryan, sound engineer Tom Murphy, and Jean-Jose Puig, a Frenchman who had spent time with the Mujahedin the previous summer. Gall wrote about the experience in Behind Russian Lines: An Afghan Journal. "Our plan," he nonchalantly wrote, "was to walk in from the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, which would take us, we estimated, a week or ten days. We would make contact with a guerrilla leader called Masud, who had been described to me as the Afghan equivalent of the young Tito, spend three to four weeks filming him and his fighters, and then walk back out. I estimated we should be back in London by the end of September," p. 13. Ryan recounted the trip in A Hitch or Two in Afghanistan (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983).

[44] See note 21 for the northeast provinces controlled by Jamiat by the mid-1980s. Chapter 7 of Urban's War in Afghanistan includes excellent accounts of Panjsher 7, which began April 17, 1984, and continued through the summer; Panjsher 8, which began in September of that year; and the growing sophistication of the Northern Alliance.

[45] See Crile, Charlie Wilson's War.

was signed on April 14, 1988.[46] The Tajik resistance group, which later became the backbone of the organization known as the Northern Alliance, would go on to challenge the Taliban-al-Qaeda militia during the late 1990s, aided by the Russian Army which had come to respect its moderate and nationalist aims.[47]

Just why the accomplishments of the Persian Front largely escaped many, if not most, of the Western officials assigned to analyze the various resistance factions is a complex phenomenon to explain. In part, the manipulation of the Afghan resistance groups by Pakistan's ISI since the mid-1970s, and corresponding efforts by that organization to mislead its Western counterparts about the true intentions of the various groups, had a dramatic impact.[48] Years later American policy-makers would emphatically defend the successive decisions, dating to the Carter Administration, to back the ISI's radical Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.[49] Additionally, as

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[46] In July 1986 Mikhail Gorbachev announced the withdrawal of 8,000 troops, which took place in October of that year, Ewans, Afghanistan: A New History, pp. 167-168. Also see Cordovez and Harrison, Out of Afghanistan: The Inside Story of the Soviet Withdrawal.

[47] By 1999, Russia and Iran had become major supporters of the Northern Alliance. See Coll, Ghost Wars, pp. 462-63.

[48] The extent to which such efforts were successful in influencing certain American foreign policy bureaucrats can be seen in the impassioned attacks by such individual on the multinational post-9/11 support for the Nationalist Karzai government. See Anonymous (later disclosed to be Michael Scheuer), Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, Inc., 2004), p. 33-58.

[49] The precedent would give way to at least tacit and quite possible material U.S. support for another Pakistani surrogate force in the mid-1990s, the Taliban. See Ahmed Rashid, "Pakistan and the Taliban," in William Maley (ed.), Fundamentalism Reborn? Afghanistan and the Taliban (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 72-90.

was mentioned earlier, the plethora of British colonial studies written from the eastern side of the Durand line and coloured by the perspective of those largely Pashtun communities has greatly stilted the West's understanding of Afghanistan. As late as the fall of 2001, a distinguished American diplomat with years of service in the region could declare that "Afghanistan is ungovernable and therefore what it needs is not a government but an *umbrella holder.*"[50]

Indeed, many Western officials and journalists apparently came to believe the assertions of many Pakistani generals and senior civilian officials that they legitimately possessed an almost neo-colonial security interest in the country.[51] The cumulative effect of this was to greatly obscure the accomplishments of the Tajik resistance forces.

As Chapter 2 points out, Pakistan's primary objective appears to have been, and continues to be, to keep a weak state on its western border. To accomplish

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[50] Interview with former U.S. ambassador to Pakistan, November 2002. The speaker, then head of a major think tank, had earlier stated, with only slight amusement, that Kipling's Kim, the tale of an Irish orphan who travels for many years to locations on the eastern side of the Durand Line with a mystic wanderer, is a "starting place for understanding Afghanistan." The statement about the umbrella holder, apparently, meant that any stronger form of government in Kabul would not be in *Pakistan's* interest - a condition that American diplomats for decades have seized on to alienate successive pro-western Afghan governments.

[51] Associated Press correspondent Kathy Gannon filed a television story in October 2001, announcing that she was reporting *from* Afghanistan, before pointing out in her closing that she was *in* Islamabad, Pakistan! Certain observers were not surprised when Ms. Gannon, the longtime *Islamabad* correspondent for AP, subtitled her 2005 book 18 Years Inside Afghanistan. See Gannon, I is for Infidel: From Holy War to Holy Terror: 18 Years Inside Afghanistan (New York: Public Affairs, 2005).

this the ISI has, since the 1970s, consistently thwarted the efforts of leading Afghan nationalists such as Massoud. In 1988 and 1999, respectively, Bahauddin Majrooh and Abdul Ahad Karzai, both Afghan nationalist leaders of the highest calibre, are believed to have been assassinated by Pakistani intelligence. Other prominent figures such as former President Sibghatullah Mujadidi and former Shah Mohammad Zahir have endured decades of Pakistani subversion and plots against their relatives and only sporadic and symbolic assistance from Pakistan throughout the decade of the Holy War.[52]

Structure

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. The first covers the period from 1732-1967. It begins with the 1732 alliance between the ambitious, and Sunni, Nadir Kuli Khan, future Shah of Iran, and the Abdali branch of the Pashtun Tribe, and documents the major role that the Persian state – and later, individuals of Persian origin – played in the formation and growth of the Afghan nation. It concludes with an examination of the Afghan government's futile attempts between 1944 and 1954 to form a loose alliance with the U.S., and the corresponding failures of U.S. diplomacy, which led to the Soviet entry into the country in 1955 under the guise

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[52]See, for example, Coll's Ghost Wars.

of economic aid.

The second and third chapters describe the origins of the Panjsher revolt, showing how, following the 1973 fall of the Shah, the nationalist wing of the Afghan Islamic movement, bringing together military officers, public servants, disaffected citizens, and urban university students, became a dominant force in the country and split from the Pashtun-radical wing.

The fourth and fifth chapters chronicle Massoud's return to Afghanistan after years of planning in the spring of 1979, and the outbreak of the Panjsher revolt. The sixth and seventh analyse how, after a number of initial setbacks, the revolt gradually developed into a full-fledged guerrilla war, owing to Massoud's political and strategic visions as well as his leadership skills and the renewed support of a number of the Panjsher's traditional leaders. This, in turn, played a role in driving the Soviets to decide, on December 12, 1979, to send troops to Afghanistan to prop up the Communist regime.

Sources

This study is based primarily on author interviews with some 75 Afghan participants, including Ahmad Shah Massoud and the dozen or so senior Panjsheri commanders who were still alive in the mid-1990s. Four were killed and one

was seriously wounded in the period following their interviews. Commander Massoud himself was assassinated on September 9, 2001, by al-Qaeda operatives who visited his base in Takhar Province posing as reporters. In addition, use has been made of the U.S. National Security Archive and the archives of the New York Times and other periodicals.

To date, only one book has been published specifically dealing with the 1979 Panjsher Rebellion: Abdul Hafiz Mansur's Diary of Jihad.[53] This 120-page book is a unique source, written by one of the brightest and most enterprising young Panjsheris involved in the anti-Communist opposition (he subsequently rose to head the government's Baktir News Agency and in 2004 stood as a presidential candidate). Mansur remained in the valley during the rebellion and drew mostly on his first-hand experiences, as well as selected interviews and documents. While his own estimates seem quite accurate, second-hand accounts are presented without assessment or comment and generally weaken the work. Thus, for example, since Mansur was in Rukha during most, or all, of 1979, the book contains good information about that area but less useful data about fighting in other villages. Some Panjsheris have complained that Mansur focused on Rukha because he wanted to glorify his own village. It is also

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[53]Abdul Hafiz Mansur, Diary of Jihad (Kabul: Jamiat Islami Political Office, 1991), translated and edited by Professor Sabour Ferozan and this author.

likely, however, that he had trouble obtaining reliable information about fighting in other places and thus, for the most part, focused on what he had personal knowledge of. His descriptions are slightly idealistic, but nevertheless contain quite valuable information on the 1979 Panjsher Rebellion.

Mark Urban's War in Afghanistan remains the primary Western military history on the Afghan war.[54] It is based mainly on secondary sources and makes only brief mention of the 1979 rebellion. It does, however, contain excellent information about the later Soviet Panjsher incursions as well as the strategic effect of the Jamiat attacks along the Salang. Olivier Roy's Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, as was previously mentioned, is by far the most sophisticated intellectual history of the anti-Soviet opposition of the 1980s and is based on his own field research.[55] Although the book contains an excellent chapter on the uprisings of 1978-79, interestingly it makes no direct references to the 1979 Panjsher Rebellion. Similarly, David Edwards' Before the Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad has added significantly to the understanding of the antecedents of the Islamic movement and the 1978-1979 rebellion,

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[54]Mark Urban, War in Afghanistan (London: Macmillan, 1988).
[55]Olivier Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

particularly in Kunar Province.[56] Edwards' earlier work, Heroes of the Age similarly provides a basis for understanding the roles of traditionalism and mysticism in Afghan political life - both key topics in his later works.[57] Radek Sikorski's Dust of the Saints: A Journey to Herat in Time of War, completed during the years of the Soviet occupation, contains valuable first-hand accounts of the 1979 Herat rebellion.[58]

Edward Girardet's Afghanistan: The Soviet War illuminates the Panjsher 5 Soviet operation in 1982 and both ITN news reader Sandy Gall's Behind Russian Lines and his producer Nigel Ryan's A Hitch or Two in Afghanistan cover Panjsher 6, which both men witnessed during that same year.[59]

Anthony Arnold's Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism: Parcham and Khalq and his 1985 study Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion in Perspective and Henry Bradsher's Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention are excellent studies on the Soviet encroachment and ultimate intervention in Afghanistan.[60] Raja Anwar's The Tragedy

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[56] David Edwards, Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

[57] David Edwards, Heroes of the Age (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).

[58] Radek Sikorski, Dust of the Saints: A Journey to Herat in Time of War (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1990).

[59] Edward Girardet, Afghanistan: The Soviet War (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985). Sandy Gall, Behind Russian Lines (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983). Nigel Ryan, A Hitch or Two in Afghanistan (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983).

[60] Anthony Arnold, Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism: Parcham and Khalq (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1983). Arnold, Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion in Perspective (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1985.) Henry Bradsher, Afghan

of Afghanistan: A First-Hand Account has also contributed to an understanding of the 1978-79 period in Afghan politics.[61]

More recently Mahnaz Z. Ispahani's Roads and Rivals, The Political Uses of Access in the Borderlands of Asia has added significantly to the West's understanding of the strategic importance of routes in Asian politics and the underlying reasons for the Soviet intervention, as well as the ultimate failure of the occupation.[62]

Two recent popular books, George Crile's Charlie Wilson's War and Steve Coll's Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001, have added significantly to the literature describing, respectively, how the Congressionally-approved CIA covert funding programme developed during the 1980s, and what, through gross mismanagement, its unintended effects were.[63]

For the background chapter, William Kerr Fraser-Tytler's Afghanistan: A Study of Political Developments in Central and Southern Asia, Olaf Caroe's The Pathans, 550 B.C. - A.D. 1957, Louis Dupree's Afghanistan, Mountstuart Elphinstone's An Account of the Kingdom of

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Communism and Soviet Intervention (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[61] Raja Anwar, The Tragedy of Afghanistan: A First-Hand Account (New York: Verso, 1988).

[62] Mahnaz Z. Ispahani, Roads and Rivals, The Political Uses of Access in the Borderlands of Asia (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989).

[63] George Crile, Charlie Wilson's War (New York: Grove Press, 2003). Steve Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001 (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004).

Caubal, and in particular Vartan Gregorian's The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946 all have added to an understanding of the general historical underpinnings of the country.[64] Willem Vogelsang's recent book, The Afghans, paints a clear picture of the country's development in the eighteenth century.[65]

Christine Noelle's State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan (1826-1863) and Robert McChesney's Kabul Under Siege: Fayz Muhammad's Account of the 1929 Uprising have done much to illuminate the role of the conquest of lesser Turkestan (1845-1863) and the nine-month reign of Habibullah Kalakani, together two of the most important recent developments in the Persian integration of the Kabul city-state.[66]

Cornelius Van Engert's long-classified 1924 analysis, A Report on Afghanistan, Leon and Leila Poullada's The

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[64] William Kerr Fraser-Tytler, Afghanistan: A Study of Political Developments in Central and Southern Asia (London: Oxford University Press, 1953). Olaf Caroe, The Pathans, 550 B.C. - A.D. 1957 (London: Macmillan & Co., 1958). Louis Dupree, Afghanistan (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973). Mountstuart Elphinstone, An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul (Karachi: Oxford University Press, reprint 1972). Vartan Gregorian, The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946 (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1969).

[65] Willem Vogelsang, The Afghans (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

[66] Christine Noelle, State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan (1826-1863) (Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 1997). Robert McChesney, Kabul Under Siege: Fayz Muhammad's Account of the 1929 Uprising (Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999). See also Hassan Kakar, Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979-1982 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

Kingdom of Afghanistan and the United States: 1828-1973, Arnold Fletcher's Afghanistan: Highway of Conquest, and Dupree's book provide a clear picture of the development of U.S.-Afghan relations through the 1960s.[67] George C. McGhee, who at the time served as U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East, adds a self-serving account of the American bureaucracy's treatment of the Afghan government during the Truman Administration in Envoy to the Middle World: Adventures in Diplomacy.[68]

Documents published by the National Security Archive in two collections - Afghanistan: The Making of U.S. Policy, 1973-1990, and The September 11th Sourcebooks, Volume II: Afghanistan: Lessons from the Last War - and by the Cold War International History Project were extremely helpful – as was the New York Times – for illuminating the specific progression of events, particularly in 1978-1979.[69]

Conclusion

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan posed a challenge

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[67] Cornelius Van Engert, A Report on Afghanistan (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, Department of State Division of Publications, Series C, No. 53, Afghanistan, No. 1). Leon and Leila Poullada, The Kingdom of Afghanistan and the United States: 1828-1973 (Omaha, Nebraska: University of Nebraska, 1995). Arnold Fletcher, Afghanistan: Highway of Conquest (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1966).

[68] George C. McGhee, Envoy to the Middle World: Adventures in Diplomacy (New York: Harper and Row, 1983).

[69] National Security Archive, Afghanistan: The Making of U.S. Policy, 1973-1990 (published 1990), and The September 11th Sourcebooks, Volume II: Afghanistan: Lessons from the Last War (National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 57, published 2001). Cold War International History Project, CWIHP Electronic Bulletin, Issues 8-9, Winter 1996/1997, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C.

to the Kabul city-state like no other in its two-century history. It would be another twenty-one years before the nationalist Hamid Karzai, an educated and Persianized Pashtun with a deep understanding of his nation's past, would arrive in the Afghan capital on a CIA flight to assume power. As President-designate Karzai, accompanied only by four or five aides, disembarked the aircraft, he was greeted by General Fahim, the acting leader of the Northern Alliance and Afghanistan's new defence minister.

"Where are your men?" the startled Fahim asked upon realizing the plane was almost empty.

Marshaling his self-confidence, Karzai, who had been chosen as Afghanistan's leader just three weeks earlier at a peace conference in Bonn, Germany, masterfully orchestrated by diplomats from the U.S., Germany, the United Nations and the neighbouring states, turned to the ethnically-Persian defence chief and replied with a smile: "General: you are my men."

This thesis provides a new understanding of the development and intellectual underpinnings of the 1979 Panjsher Rebellion fundamental to understanding modern Afghan political history. That event, and the front it spawned, were the direct precursors of the Shura Nazar, or *Northern Council,* the organization which Commander Massoud organized across Northeastern Afghanistan during

the 1983 ceasefire. Much like the Panjsher Front in the years 1979-1982, it would be responsible for three years of concentrated attacks on the Red Army, leading to the 1986 decision to withdraw. Later, these same forces would serve as the political and military foundation of the Rabbani Government, which was established in the vacuum left by the collapse of the Najibullah Government in March 1992 and the further turmoil created by the Pakistani and U.N.-brokered "peace settlement" in early 1992, involving the selection of Gul Baddin Hekmatyar as Prime Minister. After the Taliban militia's takeover of Kabul in September 1996, another Pakistani-driven event, Massoud's forces formed the core of the *Northern Alliance*, the group which prevented the Taliban from gaining full control of the country and subsequently provided a beachhead for U.S. forces after 9/11. That the 1979 Panjsher Rebellion had such a pivotal impact on later events makes it, and its antecedents, a critical area of study that, as was mentioned in the previous section on the existing literature, has heretofore been greatly overlooked by scholars.

The years 1994 through 1996, in between the turbulence that followed the fall of Najibullah and the rise of the Taliban, offered a unique opportunity to study that event in detail. Though future historians will of course bring valuable analysis to this subject,

the deaths of senior participants during and after the period when this research was conducted, and the cognitive deterioration of certain surviving participants, will pose formidable obstacles to such work.

This thesis will also, for the first time, examine the largely organic development of the Northern Alliance and, by extension, the largely missed opportunity for directing the U.S. aid programme toward that politically moderate and nationalist group. Indeed, it was only in the wake of September 11, 2001, that the Northern Alliance finally received the unqualified backing of the U.S. government.[70]

Finally, the magnitude of the political repercussions emanating from the Panjsher Rebellion requires a re-examination of the entire history of Afghanistan. While earlier studies have factually, and often in tremendous detail, recorded the major events since 1747, it is the underlying hypothesis of this work that the western, and particularly English-language interpretations of those accounts have consistently often been, like a compass set with slightly improper declination, just-in-error. It is thus the objective of

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[70] In a November 2001 meeting with Burhanuddin Rabbani, who was then the Afghan president, U.S. Presidential Envoy James Dobbins said "that the United States now recognized the mistake it had made in abandoning Afghanistan following the Soviet Union's withdrawal in 1989. The attacks of 9/11 had demonstrated the consequences of such neglect," James Dobbins, To Build a Nation (unpublished manuscript; initial chapters reviewed by P. deNeufville). It is believed to be the first official American acknowledgement of the government's misguided support first for a Hekmatyar Gulbuddin-led government in 1992 and later for the Taliban militia.

this thesis to correct that phenomenon as it prevents an accurate understanding of the two hundred and sixty-year history of the Persian-centric state.

Consider, for example, the eminent late twentieth-century American scholar on Afghanistan, Louis Dupree, who writes that the Tajik takeover in 1929, "came from an unexpected direction — *the north*."[71] Following Dupree's argument, one might assume that the southerly arrival routes on the capital of both of the country's most prominent nineteenth century monarchs, Dost Mohammad and Abdur Rahman, were similarly "unpredictable." In the case of the former Amir, his approach to the capital on two occasions, in 1826 and 1840, were in fact both from his place of exile in *the north*.[72] The cumulative effect of Dupree's work and that of other scholars of Afghanistan dating all the way back to Mounstuart Elphinstone's 1809 Account of the Kingdom of Caubal, has been to create a distorted reality, one in which the 1979 Panjsher Rebellion does not quite fit.

Yet, the events in the Panjsher Valley in 1979, following a series of nationalist occurrences throughout the 1970s and a long chain of Persian-centric events

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[71]Italics added, Dupree, Afghanistan, p. 452.

[72]Dost Mohammad's attempted return in 1839 during the First Anglo-Afghan war was short-lived and he spent the balance of the war living in India before making a third return with the aid of the British Government in 1841. While *north* and *Persian* are not completely synonymous in an Afghan context, it is useful to point out that the 1775 transfer of the capital *north* from Kandahar to Kabul alienated Timur, the shah who oversaw that move, from the Pashtuns, who considered him more "pro-Persian than pro-Afghan," Dupree, Afghanistan p. 340.

dating back to the eighteenth century, did occur as is documented here using primary sources for the first time.[73]

The idea that the 1979 Panjsher Rebellion helped *precipitate* the December 1979 Soviet intervention appears, itself, to be a discovery. Nowhere in the existing research is this reality examined, though in the aftermath of the war an increasing number of writers did acknowledge that Massoud's movement played a significant role in the defeat of the USSR's Fortieth Army - most of them, such as Crile, attributing it to Massoud's charisma.[74] Similarly, the strategic location of the Panjsher Valley, the particular geography that gave rise to the front, has been little discussed by scholars and the one contemporary academic study devoted to the topic of *routes* in Central Asia, by Mahnaz Ispahani, mentions the Panjsher resistance only in passing.[75] And yet, as this thesis illustrates, it was this factor, as well as the secular and pragmatic nature of Afghan-Persian

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[73]Though Mansur's Diary of Jihad provides a brief account of the 1979 Panjsher Rebellion, particularly in the town of Rukha, it does not mention the *nationalist* or *Persian* antecedents of the event, nor, understandably, does it look at the results of the event.

[74]Crile, for example, describes Massoud as "This one guerrilla leader, so great that he belonged in the historical company of Tito, Ho Chi Minh, Mao Tse-tung, and Che Guevara," while mentioning nothing about the mercantilist culture from which he sprung, Charlie Wilson's War, pp. 194-195.

[75]See Ispahani, Roads and Rivals: The Political Uses of Access in the Borderlands of Asia.

culture, a factor in fact long pre-dating the country's formation, that enabled the rebel leaders to attract a broad following, which in turn gave rise to the success of their very nationally-oriented movement.

Chapter 1, A Persian Nation Thrust into the Soviets' Arms: The Birth of Afghanistan and the American Entry Into the Great Game, 1732-1967.

Siege of Herat

The capture of the oasis city of Herat by Persian forces led by Nadir Kuli Khan on February 16, 1732, could well be described as the beginning of modern Afghanistan.[1] Then a brigand in the service of Shah Tahmasp I, Kuli Khan had won fame several years earlier for expelling the Ghilzai Pashtun[2] from southern Persia, where they had invaded eighteen years earlier. After the fall of Herat, a number of surrendering Abdali Pashtuns, who had defended the city, were invited to join Kuli Khan's army. The Abdalis' efforts over the next three years to help their new commander secure his southern flank, particularly in Dagistan, culminated in Kuli Khan's ascent to the throne of Persia in 1736.[3]

The former camel trader, now known as Shah Nadir Kuli Khan, then turned his attention to Kandahar. He

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[1] Herat, located in western Afghanistan, southeast of Meshad, is known for its blue mosques and minarets. The date of surrender is cited in Ganda Singh, Ahmad Shah Durrani: Father of Modern Afghanistan (London: Asia Publishing House, 1959), p. 13.

[2] The eastern branch of that Pashtun tribe.

[3] Martin Ewans, Afghanistan: A New History (Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 2001), pp. 20-26; Willem Vogelsang, The Afghans (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), pp. 225-26; Louis Dupree, Afghanistan (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 330. Upon becoming the Persian ruler, as Hamid Algar points out, Nadir "declared the ceremonial vilification of Abu Bakr and Umar, as well as other Companions of the Prophet, and rejection of the legitimacy of the first three Caliphs. Purged of these excrescences, Shi'ism was henceforth to be known as the Ja'fari *mazhab*, both to efface the connotations of sectarianism the word Shi'i inevitably carried, and to facilitate the absorption of the reformed school into the main body of Islam as a fifth Sunni mazhab." Hamid Algar: "Religious Forces in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," The Cambridge History of Iran, vol. 7 (Cambridge, England: Cabridge University Press).

calculated that if he could capture the Afghan city and liberate two Abdali princes, Zulfiqar and Ahmad, held there, it would earn him the unwavering support of the Abdalis. The reason for this, in a little-appreciated nuance of history, was that Shah Nadir, an Afshar Turk, had converted to become espoused Hannifi-Sunni practices similar to those practiced by the Abdalis and unlike most of his Shiite subjects.[4] And this alliance, the new Persian monarch recognized, would allow him to exploit a traditional weakness in the foreign policy of his principal foes.

The Moguls, who ruled much of what is modern Pakistan and western India in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, had historically contained the Ghilzai Pashtun with punitive force and bribery, resulting in little cultural or educational advancement on the part of these tribes. The Persians, however, adopted what Vartan Gregorian describes as "a more successful method of coping with the [western Abdali] tribes: they channeled their

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[4] Throughout his career Nadir Shah actively sought to reduce sectarian strife among the people he ruled over. The effect of this was alienate him from those committed to Twelver Shi'i dogma and the Shi'i ulama who sought his patronage. "Nadir's motives in promoting a revision of Shi'ism may safely be presumed to have been political; there is no evidence of personal piety in his life," Hamid Alger points out, and he adds that Nadir's religious practices may, in part, have been driven by the fact that "the majority of his soldiery was recuited from the Sunni borderlands of Iran, and it was necessary to accommodate their religious susceptibilities by the suppression of the more objectionable features of Shi'ism." Hamid Algar, "Religious Forces in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," The Cambridge History of Iran, vol. 7 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, p. 709).

military forces into the Persian armies."[5] This policy had served the Persians well since the founding of the Mogul Empire in 1525, although by the early eighteenth century the efforts of the Shi'a Safavid rulers of Persia to incorporate Hanafi-Sunni Pashtuns into their ranks had ground to a halt. As a Sunni sympathizer, Nadir Kuli Khan was able not only to reestablish this practice, but also to take it to unprecedented levels. Between the fall of Herat in 1732 and the capture of Kandahar in 1738, thousands of Abdali fighters flocked to the Persian Shah's banner, as the liberation of Zulfiqar and Ahmad Khan, the two most prominent young Abdalis, became a battle cry of the allied Persian and Afghan forces.

Following the conquest of Kandahar and the liberation of Zulfiqar and Ahmad Khan Sadozai, the Persians wrested Kabul from the Moguls before defeating the main body of the eastern army outside Delhi in 1739. During this time, eight Pashtun cavalry units came to occupy a central position, which Olaf Caroe identifies as "the spearhead of the [Persian] army."[6] Among these officers, Ahmad Khan is said to have risen to the leadership of three to four thousand "seasoned" Abdali cavalrymen and, by the age of twenty-three, the young chieftain was already serving as commander of the Shah's bodyguard.

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[5] Vartan Gregorian, The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946 (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 44.

[6] Olaf Caroe points out that Pashtun distrust of Hindu officers in the Mogul army also contributed to this factor, The Pathans, 550 B.C. - A.D. 1957 (London: Macmillan & Co., 1958), p. 224.

Shah Nadir's reliance on the Abdalis during the conquest of Central Asia in 1740-41 came at the cost of his further estrangement from the Qizilbash, as the Shiite Persian officers' corps was known.[7] The pro-Sunni Shah, as Vogelsang writes in his contemporary study, was "never really accepted by his predominantly Shiite Iranian subjects."[8] On the night of June 19, 1747, while his army camped near Ashkhabad, Shah Nadir was assassinated by senior Qizilbash officers, who sought to reassert Shiite leadership over the Persian army.[9]

The Shah's murder shattered the alliance that had bonded the Abdalis to the Persian Empire for seventeen years. Ahmad Khan and kinsmen quickly secured treasures that included the famous Koh-i-Nor Diamond,[10] and then sent their four thousand Abdali horsemen toward Kandahar. The fortune and the experience they had gained serving in the Persian army would in turn enable them to begin building

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[7] Christine Noelle, State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan: The Reign of Amir Dost Mohammad Khan (1826-1863) (Surrey, England: Curzon Press, 1997), p. 25.

[8] Vogelsang, The Afghans, p. 227. In his work, published in 2002, Vogelsang makes the first reference I have seen to Kuli Khan's Sunnism, though, since the Shah was an Afshar Turk, it is quite obvious. The author also points here to possible dementia that clouded the end of the Sunni Shah's life, including the blinding of his son, though it is difficult to calculate the strains on the Hannifi Sunni monarch of a Shi'ite nation; this was an unprecedented position, unless one includes the Ghilzai rulers of southern Persia (1721-1729). Also see Cornelius Van Engert, A Report on Afghanistan, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, Department of State Division of Publications, Series C, No. 53, Afghanistan, No. 1), p. 11, who mentions Nadir's Sunnism.

[9] For a general history of Nadir Shah's reign, see L. Lockhart, Nadir Shah: A Critical Study Based Mainly Upon Contemporary Sources (London: Luzac & Co., 1938).

[10] Singh, Ahmad Shah Durrani, p. 22; Dupree, Afghanistan, p. 332; Gregorian, The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan, p. 46.

their own state, as southwestern Asia was partitioned overnight along Shiite-Sunni lines.

Shortly following Ahmad Khan's return to Afghanistan and his coronation as Shah in 1747, he won the allegiance of certain Qizilbash officers, eager to preserve their lucrative commands. With these defections the fledgling government came to control of the cities of Kabul, Peshawar, Lahore, and Quetta. The new monarch, now known as Ahmad Shah, quickly reorganized his forces and within months of his coronation had launched the first of eight campaigns into the sub-continent, eventually establishing nominal control over a kingdom that stretched from the Persian city of Meshed west to Shrinagar in Kashmir and from the northern city of Faizabad south to the Arabian Sea.

Most significantly, Ahmad Shah's reign succeeded in preserving the Persian-Abdali alliance, restored by Nadir Shah, while reversing the groups' historical roles, as the Pashtuns came to lead the alliance. Moreover, through the recruitment of the Qizilbash and through his own education received while serving at the highest levels in the Persian Army, Ahmad Shah laid the groundwork for a state led by the Abdalis (or Durranis, as his dynasty became known) but strongly rooted in the culture of the western-bordering state of Persia. It was this synthesis that was to provide the foundation for the country's growth in the

nineteenth century and soon spurred the transfer of the capital from Kandahar to Kabul.

A Persian Capital

After Ahmad Shah's death on October 23, 1772, his son Timur was crowned the second Shah of Afghanistan. Born in Persia, the new monarch had served in the Punjab and spoke little Pashtun. In 1776, he moved his court to the alpine city of Kabul,[11] where, despite his continued support of the council in Kandahar, "he sought to create a military counterpoise to the Durranis by expanding his Qizilbash force to 12,000 men."[12] Though the rising strength of the Sikhs[13] in the east was largely to undermine the Afghan efforts to preserve Shah Nadir's expansive empire, the nation's decisive cultural and linguistic shift from Pashtun to Persian was to be lasting. By the time of his death in 1793, while much of the empire Timur had inherited was gone, the most significant changes had been brought about by the promotion of the Qizilbash to a principal role in the kingdom and the transfer of the capital to Kabul.[14]

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[11]The location where southeastern- and southwestern-running watersheds converge on a plateau extending north to the Hindu Kush.

[12]Noelle, p. 231. Also see Mountstuart Elphinstone, An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 300-301. Dupree says that the Pashtun in Kandahar "considered him more pro-Persian than pro-Afghan," p. 340.

[13]An eastern tribe that succeeded the Moguls in South Asia in the late eighteenth century and rose to power under the leadership of Ranjit Singh (1780-1839).

[14]Noelle, State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan, pp. 12-13; Dupree, Afghanistan, p. 639; Mohan Lal, Life of the Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul (Karachi: Oxford University Press, reprint 1978), pp. 43-44.

Despite the short and unsuccessful reigns of Timur's sons — Zaman Shah (1791-1800), Shah Mahmud (1800-1803, 1809-1818), and Shah Shuja (1803-1809, 1839-1842) — against a backdrop of gross overpropagation[15] and continued Durrani infighting, the Persian character of the infant Afghan state continued.[16] But the person who would contribute most to the evolution of Afghanistan's distinct national identity was a young chieftain of mixed Barakzai-Qizilbash lineage by the name of Dost Mohammad, who in 1813 became governor of the critical Tajik province of Kohistan, which at the time included both the Shamali Plain and the adjacent and ethnically similar Panjsher Valley.

Dost Mohammad Khan

While Nadir Kuli Khan's 1732 capture of Herat and subsequent alliance with the Abdali were the direct predecessors of Afghanistan's confederation, it was Dost Mohammad's arrival in Kohistan (today known just by its geographical name, *Shamali*) that led to the country's consolidation. As Arnold Fletcher put it, a "lifetime of

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[15]Timur is said to have had three hundred wives and concubines.

[16]Paradoxically, Gregorian points out that Timur's most counterproductive strategy may have been his "numerous martial alliances undertaken to strengthen the position of the monarchy among the Afghan tribes," as twenty-three or more sons went on to compete for the throne after his death, p. 50; also see William Kerr Fraser-Tytler, Afghanistan: A Study of Political Developments in Central and Southern Asia (London: Oxford University Press, second ed., 1953), pp. 67-68. Caroe puts the number at twenty-six, The Pathans, p. 267.

effort directed toward unifying and pacifying his country" was initiated by this gubernatorial appointment.[17]

The Tajiks were a well-established population who had migrated to Western Central Asia from Persia during the Middle Ages.[18] That they would eventually unite with the more recent eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Persian émigrés, the Qizilbash, seems natural. In fact, Dost Mohammad expended the better part of nine years convincing the secularly oriented Tajik highlanders that he could be their voice in Kabul. Finally, in 1826, amid ongoing anarchy, he launched his campaign to succeed the floundering Sadozai, whose ruling era had been brought to an effective close by Shah Mahmud's ill-conceived blinding and execution of his Vizar, Fath Khan Barakzai in 1818.[19] Much like Timur Shah's transfer of the capital to Kabul in 1775, Dost Mohammad's seizure of power in 1826,

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[17] Arnold Fletcher, Afghanistan: Highway of Conquest (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1965), p. 124.

[18] There is some speculation that this population intermarried with foreign outposts left along key throughfares, notably the Panjsher Valley, by various armies such as Monguls and the Greeks. Haroun Mir interview, 11 December 2004. DNA testing will shed light on the apparent ethnic anomalies or lack of homogeneity in places like the Upper Panjsher where the practice of inter-clan marriage continues to this day. Interestingly, the second of al Ahmad Khan's grandsons to come to the throne, Shah Mahmud, was deposed in 1805 after intervening on the side of the Qizilbash in sectarian clashes in Kabul. Mahmud's actions, though having a negative effect on his career, would, in the words of a later chronicler, "safeguard the regime's honor, and prevent it from being irretrievably besmirched." Faiz Mohammad Siraj al-tawarikh, volume one, p. 87. In other words, the protection of this key Persian population in Kabul at this key juncture was, in Faiz Mohammed's estimation, to have an indelible imprint on the development of the Afghan national character.

[19] The execution of a Barakzai Khan by a Sadozai monarch — the second in a generation (Fatih Khan's father, Paindar Khan, was killed in 1799 by Shah Zaman) — acutely focused the Barakzai on vengeance against the Sadozai, Fraser-Tytler, Afghanistan, pp. 68-69. Writing nine years before Fath Khan's death, the later infamous British envoy, Mountstuart Elphinstone, described the Barakzai clan as "spirited and war-like," adding that "they are a much more conspicuous figure than any other tribe among the Afghans," Elphinstone, An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul, pp. 391-426.

facilitated by joint attacks of Tajik, Qizilbash, and Persianized Abdali forces, can be seen as a fundamentally Persianate event.

Despite Dost Mohammad's successes during his first twelve years in power, on October 1, 1838, Lord Auckland, the Governor General, issued his fateful Simla Manifesto, calling for the restoration of the Sadozais, who the British official naively believed, because of the family's particular lineage, could more effectively govern the emerging Persian-centric state. The British invasion of Afghanistan that followed this demand would trigger a new east-west struggle that became known as the "Great Game."[20]

MacNaughten's Arrival in Kabul

In August 1839, ten months after Auckland's demand, a twenty-thousand-strong British force known as the Army of the Indus marched into Kabul. The British assumed power from a Shamali and Panjsheri force which, as testament to those groups' growing national significance, had occupied the capital in Shah Shuja's favour after Dost Mohammad's departure.[21] Taking an ominously nonchalant approach to the operation, one British regiment travelled with a pack of foxhounds, another with two camels bearing only

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[20]Arthur Conolly coined the term in a letter to a friend. See Peter Hopkirk, The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia (New York: Kodansha International, 1994), p. 123.

[21]Keen to prevent the Pashtun tribes' entry into a city where their influence and economic interests had steadily been growing over the previous thirteen years, this is believed to have been the Tajiks' first independent action on the national stage.

cigars.[22] Within days, Dost Mohammad had quit the country, exiting through the Tajik zones and eventually taking refuge across the Oxus River with the Amir of Bukhara.

Nine months later, in August 1841, despite subsequent uprisings by both of Afghanistan's two other major ethnic groups, the Ghilzai and the Durrani, the British commander, General William MacNaughten, issued his infamous report that the country "was perfectly quiet from Dan to Beersheba."[23] One of the few British officers who appear to have grasped the fluidity of the situation was a Kashmiri named Mohan Lal. A Muslim fluent in Persian, Lal had made strong contacts with the local population and knew of the rising resentment over the foreign presence.[24]

On the night of November 1, 1841, three British officers, including the chief political officer, Colonel Alexander Burnes, were hacked to death by a mob. Instead of mobilizing the forty-five hundred British troops at his command, General MacNaughten hesitated, denying pleas by Lal and other officers for immediate action. For seven weeks, he allowed the situation to deteriorate until on December 23, again defying the advice of his senior political officer, MacNaughten decamped for "secret talks" with Dost Mohammad's son, Akbar Khan. Later that same

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[22]Ewans, Afghanistan: A New History, p. 45; Dupree, Afghanistan, p. 379.
[23]Sir John Kaye, History of War in Afghanistan (London, 1851), vol. 1, p. 603, quoted in Ewans, Afghanistan: A New History, p. 48.
[24]See Lal, Life of the Amir Dost Mohammad Khan of Kabul, pp. 391-400.

day, the beheaded corpse of William MacNaughten was found hanging from a pole in the bazaar.[25]

On January 6, 1842, sixteen thousand British and Indian personnel set out for Jalalabad, "fully [expecting]," according to one member of the party, Lady Sale, "to have to fight [their] way out."[26]

Defeat of a Superpower

Eighty years later, in the 1920s, representatives of the British Legation in Afghanistan were invited to meet two elderly ladies then living outside Kabul. Upon hearing their story, the diplomats realized that the European-looking women were none other than survivors of the carnage of 1841. In addition to the intrepid Dr. Brydon, who had arrived alone at Jalalabad on a mortally wounded pony in the second week of January 1841, they were three of only about one hundred British to survive the foolish evacuation following MacNaughten's death. The women had been rescued as babies from the convoy and raised by local families.[27] In all, some fourteen thousand British and Indian personnel were massacred in attacks.

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[25] Dupree cites an East Indian Company secret report of 19 February 1842, questioning the role of Akbar Khan in the British envoy's death, but, as likely as anything, this was intended to deflect criticism from Dost Mohammad. Dupree, Afghanistan, p. 387; Fletcher, Afghanistan: Highway of Conquest, p. 108, quoting Captain Laurence's report.

[26] Lady Florentia Sale, A Journal of the Disasters in Affghanistan, 1841-2, 1969 edition, p. 95.

[27] Towards the end of their lives, these women chose to reveal their remarkable fate to their countrymen. The event appears to have been recently declassified. Ewans, Afghanistan: A New History, p. 50, recounts the story of the elderly ladies. Dupree in 1964 discovered a signed copy of Dr. Brydon's report of 19 January 1842,

A month-long punitive action by Queen Victoria's forces in Kabul and Shamali claimed hundreds of Afghan lives, many innocent, as various warlords took the opportunity to strengthen their control of the principal cities of Kandahar, Herat, and Tashqurghan. In late 1842, Dost Mohammad returned to a country that, far from Lord Auckland's vision of a strong anti-Russian bulwark to protect India, was neither unified nor particularly enthusiastic about an alliance with the British.[28]

Conquest of Turkistan

In 1845, Amir Dost Mohammad launched his operation to conquer the semi-autonomous states on the north slope of the Hindu Kush, historically known as Turkistan. With his path to the south and west blocked by some of his Barakzai kinsmen, the Amir's focus on the culturally northern territories, with the support of his maternal Qizilbash and allied Tajik supporters, was an obvious course. Although this area had been formally incorporated into the Sadozai Empire in 1751, by the 1840s it had been reduced to "almost a dozen petty principalities," as Noelle

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in General Sales Brigand's book in the India Office Library, which mentions, among other details, how he and some forty other mounted officers on the night of 12 January 1842 had been forced to abandon their troops struggling on foot through snow and enemy fire, Dupree, Afghanistan, pp. 389-93.

[28] The most lasting impact of Lord Auckland's decision to invade the country may have been to foster a world-power-like confidence among the Afghans. Paradoxically, during the later twentieth century this would serve British and Western interests as Afghans repeatedly cited the 1841 and 1880 victories as precursors of the (eventual) Soviet defeat in their country, thus accelerating the end of the Cold War.

described it.[29] Afghan and foreign historians, though acknowledging the results of this phase of the nation's history — that is, the transformation from confederated kingdom into modern state — have sought to perpetuate the erroneous notion that it was a Pashtun phenomenon. On the contrary, the half-Qizilbash leader, Dost Mohammad, undertook the struggle for "Lesser Turkistan"[30] (1845-1863) specifically because he could *not* rely upon the Durrani Council. The political significance, and Persian influence, of these campaigns have recently been discussed in works by Robert McChesney and Christine Noelle.[31]

In September 1855, Amir Dost Mohammad launched his long-awaited conquest of the southern zones. Eight years later, on May 27, 1863, Dost Mohammad died, two weeks after capturing Herat. Though the Amir is often cited as the leader responsible for the initial integration of the modern Afghan state, his consolidation of the Tajik northeast, which would have a fundamental bearing on the events of the 1980s, remains a little-appreciated accomplishment. Having twice displaced the Sadozais — the second time overcoming the upheaval of the first Anglo-Afghan War — Dost Mohammad's success in bringing order to the country must be attributed to the effectiveness of his

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[29]Noelle, State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan, p. 121.
[30]The Afghan portion of the region on the southern banks of the Amu Darya River is known by this name.
[31]R.D. McChesney, Waqf in Central Asia. Four Hundred Years in the History of a Muslim Shrine, 1480-1889 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). Noelle, State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan.

Durrani-Qizilbash-Tajik coalition. Not only did Dost Mohammad strengthen the Qizilbash's role in the governing alliance, but through his ties to Shamali and the Panjsher and the conquest of lesser Turkistan, he also accommodated, and relied upon, the Tajiks' entry into the nation's governing coalition.[32]

The Iron Amir

On July 22, 1880, following twenty-five years of instability punctuated by Russo-Anglo rivalries and a second British invasion, a stout, young grandson of Dost Mohammad, Abdur Rahman, marched from Samarkand via the principal Shamali town of Charikar to Kabul, where he was formally recognized as Amir by General Donald Stewart, the acting Head of State and departing commander of British forces in Afghanistan. Twenty days later, the last of Stewart's troops departed, ending the ill-fated second Anglo-Afghan war. With his court in Kabul temporarily housed in tents and mud huts, Abdur Rahman's first objective was to fend off his cousin Ayub Khan's competing claim to the throne. Ayub, who already held Herat, had seized Kandahar after the British withdrawal. The new Amir soon induced the defection of some of Ayub's troops in Kandahar, seizing that city in October 1881 as his Tajik Northern Army simultaneously captured Herat. The

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[32]Noelle, State and Tribe in Nineteenth-Century Afghanistan, p. 87.

capture of the two cities heralded the Barakzai-Qizilbash-Tajik's third generation of national leadership.

While Amir Dost Mohammad had built a Qizilbash-Tajik national army to secure the periphery of the crumbling Saddazoi kingdom, Abdur Rahman constructed the actual system of administration that would transform the still loosely confederated nation into a state. He accomplished this by appointing (and frequently rotating) provincial and regional governors to collect taxes and monitor security threats. Many of these appointees were Kabuli Qizilbash and Tajik veterans of the Amir's Northern Army. The introduction of this new and powerful class of bureaucrats made the Persian language the defining character of the emerging Kabul city-state and significantly strengthened the standing of the Persians within Afghanistan.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Kohistanis, Panjsheris, Tashqurghanis, and other Tajiks and Pashtuns slowly migrated to the capital, Kabul. Intermarriage between these groups and the urban Qizilbash, and resulting adoption of Sunni-Islamic practices, and government service all contributed to the rising phenomenon of a *Persian-Afghan culture*. Tellingly, throughout a series of revolts by the nation's major ethnic groups following Ayub Khan's defeat – Ghilzai (1886), Uzbeks (1888), and Hazaras (1891-93) – only the

Tajiks remained loyal to Abdur Rahman, although by the time he died only a small percentage of them had actually migrated to the capital.

Abdur Rahman's reign also saw increasing border tensions among the Great Powers and the absorption of the Pashtuns into the Indian Empire, thus further diluting that group's influence within the developing Afghan state. In 1887, the King of Denmark mediated and resolved a dispute between the Afghans and the Russians over the northern boundary of the country, by recognizing the Amu Darya River as the frontier. The Wakhan corridor, stretching to the frontier with China and permanently separating India and Russia, was ceded to Afghanistan in 1895. And, finally, the eastern border of the country was demarcated in detailed negotiations with British diplomat Sir Mortimer Durand in 1897, permanently separating the eastern-most Pashtun tribes from Afghanistan.[33]

Though Abdur Rahman is recognized as one of the most important leaders in Afghanistan's history, his agreement with the British on the so-called "Durand line" and the formal separation of the Pashtun tribes may have done almost as much to seal the fate of his dynasty as did the missteps of his successors, particularly in maintaining their relations with the Tajiks.

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[33]Fletcher, Afghanistan: Highway of Conquest, p. 166.

Habibullah's Murder

When Abdur Rahman died in 1898, his eldest son, Habibullah, assumed the throne. The fourth Barakzai-Qizilbash[34] soon became embroiled in a dispute with the new and ambitious viceroy, Lord Curzon, who suspended the subsidies extended to the country after the Second Anglo-Afghan War. Despite this, throughout World War I, British suzerainty was maintained. Following the Amir's mysterious murder while on a hunting trip in Laghman in February 1919,[35] Habibullah was succeeded by his son Amanullah, a leader of the so-called "war party" that lobbied to support the Central Powers during World War I. Upon assuming the throne, Amanullah declared Afghanistan's independence from Britain and, with encouragement from the new Soviet government, incited Pashtuns on both sides of the Durand line to rise up. The British responded by launching the brief air campaign that has become known as the Third Anglo-Afghan War.[36] Though the armistice extracted conditions from the Afghans that terminated all subsidies and permanently recognized the eastern border of the country, the British agreed to restore Afghanistan's

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[34] Though he was perhaps only twenty-five percent Quizilbash, culturally he was thoroughly Persianized and he spoke little Pashtun. See Fraser-Tytler, Afghanistan.

[35] Ewans writes that the most likely regicide was Amanullah, Afghanistan: A New History, p. 86.

[36] The air campaign in which the RAF operating one Handly Page V-1500 out of Peshawar quickly brought the new Amir's government to submission following the successful targeting of the Arg Palace, a Kabul armaments factory and, symbolically, the tomb of Amir Abdur Rahman. More antiquated British planes dropped hundreds of bombs on the eastern city of Jalalabad. On one day alone, the RAF delivered over three thousand pounds of ordinance to the winter capital, leading Amanullah to appeal to the Viceroy Lord Chelmsford on 24 May 1919.

right to conduct its own foreign relations.[37] Amanullah's dialogue with Soviet Russia continued, though over the next eight years he would develop an increasingly pro-Western stance.[38]

In July 1928, after suppressing a rebellion of the Mengal and Jaji tribes with British-supplied aircraft, Amir Amanullah returned, overland, at the wheel of a Rolls Royce, from his maiden overseas tour, which had included stops in numerous European and Middle-Eastern capital cities. The Amir proceeded to announce, at a hastily convened national council, that Afghan men should cut their beards and dress in Western clothes, and that women should be educated and cease wearing Islamic head-covers. Shockingly, he then went on to rhetorically ask, "Is it not shameful that the women of Europe are more laborious and more active than the men of Afghanistan?"[39] For a traditional Islamic society such as Afghanistan's, the effect of the Amir's pejorative comments was cataclysmic.

The negative domestic response was first felt in an uprising that soon developed in the eastern city of Jalalabad. Even when his emissaries returned from that city with exorbitant demands, the Amir appears to have had little appreciation of the danger he faced. Most likely,

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[37]Agreement was subject to six months probation; over the strong objections of Lord Curzon, then Foreign Secretary, Chelmsford restored Afghanistan's sovereignty.

[38]See Leon B. Poullada, Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, 1919-1929: King Amanullah's Failure to Modernize a Tribal Society (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1973).

[39]Quoted in Poullada, Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, p. 169.

he believed that regardless of the worsening political situation in the east, he could rely on the Barakzai-Qizilbash dynasty's traditional Tajik allies in the northeast. In the midst of the deteriorating situation he attempted to arrest a popular Tajik militia leader named Habibullah Kalakani.[40] This proved to be a fatal error of judgement.[41]

On December 14, 1928, two thousand Tajik fighters assembled at the Murad Beg Fort, on the outskirts of Kabul, and proclaimed Kalakani the new Amir of Afghanistan.[42] Having demolished the hundred-year alliance with the Tajiks that had enabled his forefathers to pit various Pashtun tribes against each other, Amanullah was now forced to turn for aid to a shadowy Ahmadzai-Ghilzai chief, Ghausuddin Khan.[43] After collecting money and arms in Kabul, Ghausuddin did raise an army, but instead of returning to help Amanullah, proceeded to seize the city of Ghazni, where he, too, was proclaimed Amir. This

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[40]Habibullah Kalakani (the suffix "i" denotes "of [the town of] Kalaquan") has historically been known as *Bachah-i Saqqao*, or "son of the water carrier" (his father's profession), the pejorative name having been kept alive by anti-Tajik Afghan chroniclers and their uncritical English-speaking counterparts.

[41]Roy points out that "there can be no doubt that the uprisings of the Basmachi against the Soviet regime had repercussions in the Shamali and Panjsher, where Mawlawi Abdul Hayy, an alim and a former student at Deoband, joined Enver Pashah in 1920," Islam and Resistance in Afghanian, p. 66. Whether these sentiments were fully appreciated by Amanullah, they were insufficient warning to his ultimate blunder in the key region adjacent to the capital.

[42]Fearing that to enter the capital without a designated "Amir" would be a violation of the Shariat, the rebels were careful to hold the ceremony and offer Friday prayers before passing the village of Dih-i-Kupak at approximately 3.00 p.m., R.D. McChesney, Kabul Under Siege: Fayz Muhammad's Account of the 1929 Uprising (Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1999), p. 37.

[43]Dubiously, that individual's father had led a revolt against the late Amir Habibullah.

development "seriously affected the morale of the few troops remaining to defend Kabul" from the Tajiks.[44] Government forces in Jalalabad, Laghman, Dakka, and Kahi soon began to desert en masse. On January 14, 1929, three days after a second betrayal by Ghilzai tribesmen at Jagdalak, Amir Amanullah quit the capital.

The Tajik Amir

On January 16, 1929, Kalakani negotiated the surrender of the Arg Palace with the assistance of the British Minister, Sir Francis Humphrys.[45] The Tajiks' jubilation at seizing the traditional seat of government was heightened by the discovery that they were taking possession of a well-stocked national treasury.[46] On April 19, four thousand freshly paid Suleiman Khel-Ghilzai, allied with Kalakani, attacked and defeated the former amir's remaining army in Ghazni.

Following this defeat of Amanullah, Nadir Khan Moussabin, the former Afghan Chief of Staff and hero of the Third Anglo-Afghan War, became the central figure in the growing anti-Tajik opposition movement.

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[44] Poullada writes that Amanullah by this point seems to have been increasingly led by Turkish advisors who failed to grasp the central importance of Tajiks in the stability of the capital, Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, p. 175.

[45] Quite probably MujadidiMujaddidi, a key nationalist religious leader who opposed Amanullah, or Kalakani himself, had realized that by staging their siege from Bagh-i-Bala adjacent to the British legation, they would be able to draw the British into negotiations on their behalf. In fact, the British Legation was heavily damaged by Amanullah's artillerymen.

[46] When the looting ended, McChesney says, Habibullah "began to move what was left in the treasury north to [Kohistan]," Kabul Under Siege, p. 50.

In the summer of 1929, Nadir Khan petitioned the British, who were keenly interested in ending the chaos in the neighbouring state, for the support of the Pashtun tribes, particularly the Mahsud and the Wazir living on the British side of the Durand line. He warned them that if such assistance was not forthcoming, he would quit the fight.[47]

Persuaded, in September the Indian government instructed its tribal agents to permit individual Pashtun fighters, or groups, to enter Afghanistan. Little encouragement seemed necessary: large numbers of Mahsud and Wazir soon joined Nadir's force, thus provoking the Afghan tribes into action. Though his brother Hashim Moussabin was unsuccessful in overcoming the atypically allied Tajik and Ghilzai forces east of Kabul late in the summer, a couple of weeks later, on September 27, the forces of his other brother, Shah Wali, seized Charasiah, the southern approach to the capital.[48]

By the second week of October 1929, the Arg Palace was under siege for the second time in a year. Amir Habibullah Kalakani fled the capital on the night of October 12. Pursued by Nadir's forces, he surrendered four days later on the promise of safe conduct.

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[47]The correspondence between Nadir Khan and the government of India is in the India Office Library, London LPS/10/1232, 1928, p. 50. Britain's fear of ongoing turmoil in Afghanistan if Habibullah was successful in his drive for legitimacy was linked to a realization of both the Tajiks' historic role and the close ties that the group enjoyed with Soviet Central Asia.

[48]Poullada, Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, p. 193.

Kalakani's previous experience of Pashtun duplicity was promptly repeated: upon returning to Kabul, he found himself imprisoned in the Arg Palace. In a last photograph after his capture, which would later become an enduring political symbol to Tajik Afghans, the leader looked fatigued, his turban slightly askew as he stood upright and stared fixedly into the camera, his arms — possibly already trussed — tucked under a tightly wrapped dark shawl.

On the morning of November 1, 1929, Habibullah Kalakani and ten of his supporters and relatives were led to gallows erected outside the palace. In the second of three violent deaths to befall Afghan monarchs in a fourteen-year span,[49] the Persian outlaw-turned-monarch was hanged.

Assassination of Nadir Shah

With no money in the treasury to compensate the tribes for bringing him to power, Nadir spent his first weeks on the throne watching his subjects loot the capital and surrounding bazaars. Andre Viollis, the only foreign correspondent to witness the mayhem following the Tajiks' overthrow, wrote that "the [Pashtun] tribesmen considered

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[49]They were Amir Habibullah Barakzai (1919), Amir Habibullah Kalakani (1929), and Shah Nadir Moussabin (1933).

Kabul an enemy capital."[50] Despite this, the new monarch quickly moved to mend relations with the Tajiks, appointing the sons of prominent leaders to serve in his own bodyguard.[51] To strengthen his rule, Nadir assumed the title of "Shah," not in use since Dost Mohammad succeeded Shah Shuja for the second time in 1842.

Once marauding tribesmen had been ejected from the capital, Nadir's double challenge was to restore the domestic order that had been disrupted by Amanullah's political follies and the subsequent Tajik takeover, while advancing his own aspirations for the country's modernization. The new Shah soon affirmed Kalakani's strict enforcement of sharia and restored purdah regulations[52] that he had enacted, while successfully implementing a constitution that largely resembled the one proposed by the toppled Amanullah.[53]

Following a second revolt by the Shamali-Tajiks in 1930, which was aggressively suppressed by the execution of scores of individuals, and a brief Soviet incursion into the Kunduz area of Afghanistan later that year, the new government initiated construction of a road through the Hindu Kush to activate their authourity in the

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[50] Poullada, Reform and Rebellion in Afghanistan, p. 196. It was a phenomenon that would be repeated in September 1996 as the Taliban militia spilled into the Persian-speaking city.

[51] One such appointment was given to Dost Mohammad Khan, the son of Amir Habibullah's former household treasurer Yahya Khan and the father of Ahmad Shah Massoud. See interview with Dost Mohammad Khan, February 1992.

[52] Religious codes governing dress and public behavior of women.

[53] For constitutional details, see Ewans, Afghanistan: A New History, p. 101.

northern provinces, which had been so important to the previous ruling house.[54] All these ambitious plans were abruptly stopped on November 8, 1933, when the shah was assassinated by Abdul Khaliq, the protégé of one of Nadir's political rivals, and succeeded on the throne by his son, the frail nineteen-year-old Prince Zahir.[55]

Wallace Murray

Throughout the late 1920s and the 1930s, the U.S. Assistant Secretary for Near East Affairs, Wallace Murray, had waged a vigorous campaign against nearly all U.S. efforts to increase ties with Kabul, claiming that Afghanistan "was the most fanatical, hostile country on earth."[56] Murray was so motivated that on at least one occasion he seems to have enlisted the FBI in intimidating a U.S. businessman who wished to establish trade relations there. In early 1928, he thwarted a planned visit by Amir

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[54] The Soviet force invaded in pursuit of partisan leaderIbrahim Beg, who was soon driven back across the Oxus and captured, Ewans, Afghanistan: A New History, p. 102; also see Hopkirk, Setting the East Ablaze: Lenin's Dream of an Empire in Asia (London: John Murray, 1984). In response to this action and the Soviets' increasing ambitions towards India, the British in 1931 extended a subsidy of 175,000 pounds and a gift of 10,000 rifles to Nadir Shah to help the new government. The British were also alarmed by Soviet support for Abdul Ghaffur Khan (grandfather of Wali Khan) and the "red shirt movement" (Khudai Khidmatgars), which dominated the North-West Frontier Province in 1930. Also see Roseanne Klass (ed.), The Great Game Revisited (New York: Freedom House, 1987).

[55] Fraser-Tytler, Afghanistan: A Study of Political Developments in Central and Southern Asia, p. 241; Fletcher, Afghanistan: Highway of Conquest, p. 234. In the opinion of Louis Dupree, the succesion had far-reaching implications for Afghanistan's future: "Logically and in keeping with the pattern of Afghan illegitimate succession, Shah Mahmud should have seized power, proclaimed himself king, incarcerated his nephew, Mohammad Zahir, and perhaps fought with his brothers for the throne. What actually happened changed the character of the modern Afghan monarchy, and set Afghanistan on the evolutionary political path it still follows," Afghanistan, p. 476.

[56] Murray to Wells, 8 April 1940, United States National Archives (hereafter USNA) 124.90h/49.

Amanullah, who sought to establish these relations, by claiming that "the United States has *already* recognized Afghanistan," while in a subsequent case five and a half years later, he denied a diplomatic visa to Shah Mahmoud, then the Afghan Minister of War, arguing that "We do not recognize Afghanistan."[57] Not until Joseph Grew, the venerable U.S. diplomat and Ambassador to Japan, complained on October 26, 1933, about the ambiguity of the U.S. position towards Afghanistan was Murray forced to capitulate over recognition.[58]

The Arrival of Minister Engert

Cornelius Van H. Engert's arrival in Kabul as Minister in July 1942 was something of a homecoming. Twenty years earlier, as a young Foreign Service officer stationed in Iran, he had been the first U.S. diplomat to visit Kabul. Two years after his return to Washington he had published a 225-page, classified study recommending formal American recognition of the country.[59] Engert's posting previous to

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[57] Poullada, Afghanistan and the United States, pp. 48, 50; USNA 1930-39 files, box 4085, 890h.602 including Department memo, 24 July 1928; DOS telegram to USE, Rome No. 6, 20 January 1928, USNA 890h.00/1 political affairs; and Berlin dispatch 1546, 24 August 1933, and London telegram 388, 11 February 1933.

[58] Poullada, Afghanistan and the United States, pp. 50-53. "Grew's prestige was such, as to not admit of an equivocal reply," Poullada writes. "The pressures [from within the State Department] for establishment of diplomatic relations finally coincided with the election of an internationally-minded President, Franklin Roosevelt, and almost at once American policy began to shift in favour of recognition." On 22 January 1935, William Hornibrook, the U.S. Minister in Tehran, was co-accredited to Kabul, though it was not until Engert's arrival in 1942 that the U.S. had a resident envoy in Kabul.

[59] Although the report explicitly recommended U.S. diplomatic recognition, it was, more importantly, the first U.S. historical survey of the country and remains one of the most cogent.

his return to Kabul had been as Consul General in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 1933-35, where he had witnessed the overthrow of Haile Selassie's government by Fascist Italy, as well as the completely ineffective efforts of the international community to resist it. On presenting his credentials to Zahir Shah on July 25, 1942, he seemed determined to prevent a similar event from occurring at his new posting.

With little choice but to hope that the results of the Allied war effort would soon speak for themselves, the Minister busied himself in a virtual "one-man rescue" of the landlocked Afghan economy as he lobbied Allied authorities to provide fixed shipping allocations for critical exports and imports.[60] These efforts often pitted the interests of the Afghans against those of British India, which preferred to see the neighbouring state stagnate. Many of these conflicts were ascribed to the zeal of "young wartime bureaucrats in the Government of India" who worked in the relevant inter-Allied agencies. Owing to the strategic nature of his mission – to ensure the overland supply routes to the USSR in the event of the Nazis' recapture of Iran – and his strong support in the U.S. War Department, Engert and his team eventually overcame British objections and obtained fixed shipping

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Cornelius Van H. Engert, A Report on Afghanistan, Department of State Division of Publications, Series C, No. 53, Afghanistan, No. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924).

[60] Leon B. Poullada and Leila D.J. Poullada, The Kingdom of Afghanistan and the United States: 1828-1973 (Omaha, Nebraska: University of Nebraska, 1995), pp. 74-76.

quotas for the Afghans.[61] By the end of the Second World War, "Afghan officials from the Prime Minister on down" had come to appreciate "the persistence and courage of Engert, 'the stubborn little Dutchman,'" as they referred to him.[62] Even before the end of World War II, Engert had come to personify an American government that the Afghans saw as a uniquely disinterested participant in their long-troubled foreign affairs.[63]

For most of the war, Assistant Secretary Murray, whose extreme fear of the Central Asian state, much like his later counterparts, likely stemmed in part from the potential of a posting or even a visit, was forced to muzzle himself. Only in late 1944, as Nazi forces retreated across Eastern Europe, did Murray begin regaining the initiative, successfully blocking the Afghans' first request for post-war U.S. aid. It would be the first key step toward driving a wedge between the U.S. and its *de facto* ally, Afghanistan.[64]

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[61] Ewans points out that the effect of the Engert shipping quotas was that following the war, the country was "financially buoyant, as she had been able to spend little during the war years, while still selling abroad her karakul and agricultural produce," Afghanistan: A New History, p. 105.

[62] Poullada, Afghanistan and the United States, p. 77.

[63] See Stephen Kinzer, All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons, 2003) and Poullada, Afghanistan and the United States, p. 77.

[64] Afghanistan formally remained non-aligned throughout the war, though through Engert's efforts it most likely would have provided the Allies with Central Asian supply routes had they become necessary. Ewans points out that following the Afghans' wartime cooperation with the U.K., they "reminded the Indian government of their interest [in the self-determination of the Pashtuns], but received the blunt reply that the Durand Line was an international frontier and that what happened on the Indian side was none of their business," Afghanistan: A New History, p. 106.

On October 16, 1945, Ambassador Engert, on the eve of leaving the country, cabled Washington to lobby in support of an additional Afghan request to purchase basic military supplies from the U.S. Engert's appeal cited both Britain's recent extension of ten-year credits as an attempt to retain their monopoly and the fact that most of the materials the Afghans sought were non-combat equipment.[65] The State Department responded to Engert on November 9, 1945, with familiar ambiguity: "The sale of military surplus on credit requires a special application to the Surplus Property Administration for exemption to Section 15(a) of the Surplus Property Act." The cable added that "at this time it has not been determined what countries can be granted such exceptions."[66] With the war over and the need for Allied supply routes through Central Asia gone, Engert was powerless to defy Murray and other State Department bureaucrats who were anxious never to see the frontier state themselves. In addition to missing an opportunity to avert the Soviets' initial entry into the country eight years later, the Truman Administration's decision, albeit by mid-level functionaries, of alienating

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[65] Poullada, Afghanistan and the United States, p. 131. Engert had also written to the State Department in July that "recent Afghan experiences with tribal dissidents had resulted in a decision to form a small, effective force consisting of mountain brigades for operations in the tribal areas, backed by a well-trained gendarmerie for internal security and border patrol," Poullada, Afghanistan and the United States, p. 130, citing Secret Dispatch No. 793, 23 July 1945. USNA 890H.24/7-23-45.

[66] Poullada, Afghanistan and the United States, p. 131. In 1946, the State Department for the fourth time rejected the Afghan request.

a pro-U.S. but non-aligned state, was to help create a broad and damaging precedent for U.S. interests.[67]

Prime Minister Mahmoud's Visit to Washington

In mid-1948, the new Afghan Prime Minister, Shah Mahmoud, paid a visit to U.S. Secretary of State George Marshall in Washington. Personable and intelligent, Mahmoud, who had succeeded his older brother Hashim two years earlier, was regarded as "having a reputation for tolerance" and being very pro-American.[68] Given the now *four* official rejections for aid by the Afghans' unofficial wartime Allies, two of which had preceded the Engert appeal, Mahmoud's government had also placed an arms order in June 1947 with the SKODA firm in the still western state of Czechoslovakia.[69] Though U.S. military aid clearly remained the Afghan government's top international priority, the Afghans were eager not to appear overly dependent on American largesse. Sitting down with Marshall, the Afghan Premier presented the case for the

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[67] Despite this strategic decision, certain commercial benefits did accrue from the World War II alliance. Dupree points out that the Morrison Knutson Co., an American firm, did negotiate, beginning in late 1945, to take over a development project in the Helmand Valley, adjacent to Kandahar, from German and Japanese teams that had been expelled in October 1941 at the behest of the Allies, Afghanistan, pp. 480-483. As much as anything else, it was this relationship which became representative of post-war U.S.-Afghan relations. "From the beginning," Dupree writes, "misunderstandings arose concerning areas of responsibility and capabilities of the two parties," p. 483.

[68] Fletcher, Afghanistan: Highway of Conquest, p. 242.

[69] USNA 890H.24/3-25-46, cited in Poullada, Afghanistan and the United States, p. 132 and note 11. The Communist coup in Czechoslovakia did not occur until April 1948, thrusting Czechoslovakia into the Soviet sphere.

U.S. providing his government with modest military support.

"Who's the enemy?" the Secretary of State curtly interrupted him. The erudite Prime Minister calmly replied that he felt his nation could be threatened by the USSR, much as Eastern Europe was. Upon hearing this, Marshall burst into "derisive laughter" at the prospect of the Afghans resisting a potential Soviet invasion long enough for the Allies to intervene.[70] Marshall proceeded to challenge Mahmoud's assertion that, in the absence of U.S. aid, his government would be forced to turn to the USSR for support. The pro-U.S. Prime Minister was then, in turn, forced into the humiliating position of having to be subtly threatening in his response.

"Islam forbids eating pork," Mahmoud addressed the former war leader. "But if the situation is desperate and survival is at stake, it is permissible to eat."[71]

In November 1949, a little over a year after Mahmoud's unsuccessful visit to Washington, it was announced over the radio that the Prime Minister's nephew,

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[70]There could have been no misunderstanding by Marshall of the Afghan's sincerity. The State Department memorandum regarding the previous visit with Prince Naim quotes the envoy as saying, "Properly armed and convinced of U.S. backing the Afghans would stand in the Hindu Kush and hold the Soviets back to give the United States and its allies time to defend the Middle East and South Asia," USNA 890H.20/11-19-48, from Poullada, Afghanistan and the United States, p. 142. Also, an identical strategy was being employed by NATO in Syria and Iran, countries that were wealthier but historically less successful at repelling foreign advances; the Secretary's condescending reaction was a clear indication to the Prime Minister of the U.S. view of his country's importance, not the futility of the proposed policy.

[71]Armin Meyer letter to Leon Poullada 8 June 1986, quoted in Poullada, Afghanistan and the United States, p. 133. The metaphor, a diplomatically phrased warning, may have also been Mahmoud's frank appraisal of his own political longevity.

Prince Mohammad Daoud, would be the new Minister of Tribal Affairs. Almost at once, presumably with the new minister's encouragement, a "Government of Pashtunistan" was formed in the eastern Ghilzal Provinces under Haji Mirza Ali Khan, a former Nazi agent already believed by that time to be working with the Soviets. Historian Anthony Arnold has argued that it was only in mid-1950 that "the USSR finally appeared to recognize the opportunity that Afghanistan's short-sighted Pashtunistan policy was affording them."[72] In light of Daoud's and Mirza Ali's later Soviet liaisons, it is entirely possible that at this point, in late 1949, Moscow was already playing an active role in the developing border conflict.[73]

Courting Assistant Secretary McGhee

By 1951, Prince Daoud, who was deeply offended by U.S. policymakers' successive rebuffs of his uncle and their increasing Pakistani-based regional policy, was named Minister of Defence. In light of Daoud's exploitation of the Pashtunistan issue to fuel his rise to power, and his later Soviet leaning, it may seem ironic that he made U.S. aid his top goal throughout 1950 and 1951. Always

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[72]Anthony Arnold, Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion in Perspective (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1985), p. 30.

[73]See Klass (ed.), The Great Game Revisited, and Henry Bradsher, Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). In addition to establishing a five-hundred-student school in Kabul to educate and politically inculcate children from the disputed territories, there were reports that the Afghans were organizing guerilla training, presumably for cross-border operations, James Spain, The Pathan Borderland (The Hague: Mouton & Company, 1963), p. 241, quoted in Poullada, Afghanistan and the United States, p. 100.

mercurial, Daoud was undoubtedly influenced by Prime Minister Mahmoud's pro-Western views and by those of his brother, Prince Naim, who was then serving as ambassador to the U.S. At a meeting in early 1951, Naim again warned U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs George McGhee that if even symbolic aid were not forthcoming, his government might have to approach the USSR. McGhee later recalled his response:

> Sensing that [Naim] was bluffing from the obvious futility of the Afghan government's relying on Russian military aid, I picked up the phone and asked my secretary to get me the number of the Russian embassy. I wrote it on a piece of paper and handed it to Prince Naim, whereupon we both laughed.[74]

The Istanbul Protocol

Unbeknownst to Naim, two months before this disappointing encounter, the Assistant Secretary had attended a key regional conference of American ambassadors in Istanbul. According to McGhee's memoirs, that event, coming more than three years after George Kennan had formulated the U.S.'s "containment doctrine," established that:

> In the case of states bordering on the USSR we should continue large-scale military aid and, where necessary, economic aid and encourage strong popular resistance to Communist aims.[75]

Despite this clear mandate, McGhee, writing years later, claimed that "there was never any doubt that our policy,

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[74]George C. McGhee, Envoy to the Middle World: Adventures in Diplomacy (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), p. 304. McGhee took pride in the dramatic miscalculation even twenty-eight years after the Soviet entry into the country in 1955.

[75]McGhee, Envoy to the Middle World, pp. 269-270.

during my tenure as Assistant Secretary, was against military aid to Afghanistan."[76]

The State Department's widening duplicity on the Afghan aid issue and deepening alliance with Pakistan manifested itself again in March 1951 at talks between McGhee and Minister Daoud in Kabul. "None of the previous Afghan requests [for nominal U.S. aid] had been official," McGhee announced to his stunned hosts. The insult was hastily compounded by a disingenuous solicitation: If the Afghans wished aid, "a formal list should be presented to the embassy with a list of specific requirements."[77]

McGhee, of course, had little more interest than Murray had had in the 1930s in increasing U.S.-Afghan ties, and on December 8, 1951, the U.S. Ambassador in Kabul, George Merrell, delivered a response to the "official" request so laden with conditions, including full United Nations disclosure of even small arms transfers and effective Pakistani approval, that Prime Minister Mahmoud declared it a "political refusal."[78] The pro-American Afghan Prime Minister's career was effectively at an end.

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[76]McGhee letter to Leon Poullada, 29 August 1985, quoted in Poullada, Afghanistan and the United States, p. 144. Poullada wryly inquired regarding the Istanbul meeting: "Is it possible that Assistant Secretary of State McGhee and all those professional diplomats experienced in Middle East geography did not realize that Afghanistan had a common border with the USSR?" Afghanistan and the United States, p. 145.

[77]USNA 890h.20/17 December 1951.

[78]This was to be the last significant act of Mahmoud's once-promising career, the final six months of which were spent in a state of depression and infirmity. For a discussion of Mahmoud's tenure as prime minister, see Dupree, Afghanistan, pp. 494-498.

Daoud's Rise

By May 1953, it was clear to the Afghans that the benign neglect of the Truman Administration was being replaced by the outright hostility of the newly elected Eisenhower Administration. For the Afghans, who had had their diplomatic efforts repeatedly spurned over the previous decade, this was a very discouraging development. In stark contrast to Engert's collaborative stance during World War II, Dulles's new envoy in Kabul, Angus Ward, adopted an adversarial tone towards the Afghan government.[79]

In August 1953, Mahmoud resigned in frustration over the failure to establish relations with the U.S. and the following month, Daoud became Prime Minister.[80] The month after that, his brother, Prince Naim, was back meeting at the U.S. State Department in Washington. This time, to avoid any miscommunication, he had arranged to meet personally with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. After no less than a dozen rebuffs by the U.S. government over the previous ten years, both brothers may have felt that, culturally and militarily, it was important for

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[79] Poullada states that "The Pakistanis wanted to topple Daoud" and "Ambassador Ward and the CIA station chief in Kabul were in favour of cooperating," Afghanistan and the United States, pp. 104-105. Such sentiments, particularly in light of U.S. covert operations in Iran during this period, were likely not unknown to the Afghans. Regarding the U.S.-supported coup against the nationalist Iranian prime minister, Mohammed Mossadeq, see Kinzer, All the Shah's Men.

[80] See Sultan Ghas interview, 22 November 2005.

their country to be linked to one of the two emerging postwar superpowers.

In this last appeal, paradoxically, Naim appears not to have restated the possibility of Soviet aid, as he and Mahmoud previously had, taking instead a purely pro-American view. This tactic led the internationally inexperienced Dulles to comment after the meeting that "if the Afghans were already so anti-Russian, it wasn't necessary to worry about them."[81] In fact, Dulles, perhaps egged on by Murray's like-minded successor McGhee, was intent on isolating the Afghans and, to insure that outcome, took the unusual step of copying the Pakistani Ambassador to Washington on his negative reply to Naim, sent December 28, 1954.[82] The Afghans' response to this double affront — albeit in the context of a Cold War of which they had no clear understanding — was neither long in coming nor, in light of repeated warnings, unpredictable.

Daoud's Announcement

Afghanistan's acceptance of a US$100 million Soviet loan in January 1955, preceding Moscow's penetration of Egypt by a full eight months, appears to have caught U.S.

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[81] See Poullada's interview with Helen Nicholl, a Foreign Service officer in the State Department's Office of South Asian Affairs, December 1957, from Poullada, Afghanistan and the United States, Note 11, p. 149.

[82] Dulles wrote: "After careful consideration, extending military aid to Afghanistan would create problems not offset by the strength it would generate. Instead of asking for arms, Afghanistan should settle the Pushtunistan dispute with Pakistan," quoted in Poullada, Afghanistan and the United States, p. 149.

officialdom by surprise.[83] The situation rapidly deteriorated after the Pakistani Government announced on March 27 the consolidation of all the provinces of West Pakistan into one administrative unit, in an effort to limit the power of the Pashtun tribes. Three days later, Afghan mobs sacked Pakistani diplomatic posts in Afghanistan. The northwestern corner of South Asia was descending into turmoil.

After nine years of hostile U.S. diplomacy, Daoud had called John Foster Dulles' bluff. The degree to which the U.S. was caught off guard by this action can be measured by the speed with which Washington responded. In early 1956, the obstinate Ambassador Angus Ward was formally recalled, and by 1957 the U.S. started training Afghan officers in the U.S. At that point, however, a National Security Council report correctly observed that "Afghanistan has incurred so huge a burden of debt to the Communist bloc as to threaten its future independence."[84] In August 1961, relations between the Afghan and Pakistani governments again erupted into active conflict.

For the Soviets, Afghanistan's economic penetration and isolation could not have been better; for ordinary Afghans, the situation brought the worst economic crisis

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[83] See Dupree, Afghanistan, p. 508.
[84] Declassified Documents Reference System, Fiche No. 44B (NSC 5617). Quoted in Poullada, Afghanistan and the United States, p. 152.

since 1942.[85] The pro-USSR stance of the regime of Prime Minister Daoud and his brother and their longtime opposition to a democratic constitution increasingly came to be seen by the Shah and others as symptoms of the same ailment.

Subversion of the Constitution

On March 9, 1963, Kabul Radio announced that Zahir Shah had accepted Prime Minister Daoud's resignation, though it was quite clear he had been fired. The broadcast on that day went on to say that Mohammad Yousef, the pro-Western Minister of Mines and Industry, had been asked to form a new government. It is interesting that Yousuf was a Qizilbash who called himself a Tajik. Three weeks later, the Shah announced the formation of a committee to be chaired by Shamsuddin Majrooh, the Minister of Justice, to forge a new constitution.

On October 1, 1964, Zahir Shah, as President of the Constitutional Convention, signed into law a new governing document that provided for a bicameral Parliament. Though short of a fully representative government, for a country which nine years earlier had felt forced to embrace the USSR, it nonetheless represented a dramatic victory for

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[85]Airlifts of fresh fruit to the USSR increased from 7,250 tons in 1961-62 to 11,000 tons in 1962-63; however, payment for that produce decreased from US$1.46M to US$1.43M, respectively, Dupree, Afghanistan, pp. 545, 552. See also Fletcher, Afghanistan: Highway of Conquest, pp. 275-276.

democracy and the rule-of-law. Sadly, these gains were to be short-lived.

Just one year into Afghanistan's democracy, Dr. Yousef appeared in the lower house on October 14, 1965, to formally present the interim government's report to the Shah. The session quickly heated up as Babrak Karmal, the leader of the Communist faction, verbally attacked the Prime Minister and his cabinet, accusing them of graft.[86] By this point, the lower house had split into five factions: four democratic and one Communist. Eleven days later, on October 25, Karmal's faction, having gained the initiative, mobilized an all-day demonstration near Yousuf's house in Kabul, which most likely took place with KGB planning and guidance.[87]

In the late afternoon, in an event that has never been conclusively explained, an Afghan military unit armed with Soviet rifles opened fire on the crowd of demonstrators, killing three students and wounding many others.[88] This unprovoked attack, occurring outside the prime minister's house, rocked the mountaintop capital perhaps like no other event since the death of Nadir Shah. On October 29, 1965, Mohammad Yousef resigned, citing "ill health."[89] Although the Shah quickly appointed Mohammad

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[86] Dupree, Afghanistan, pp. 590-597.
[87] See Klass (ed.), The Great Game Revisited, p. 52.
[88] P. Reardon, "Modernization and Reform: The Contemporary Endeavors," in George Grassmuck, Ludwig Adamec and Frances Irwin (eds.), Afghanistan: Some New Approaches, 1969, pp. 149-203, cited in Dupree, Afghanistan, p. 592.
[89] Dupree, Afghanistan, p. 595.

Hashim Maiwandwal, the former Afghan Ambassador to Great Britain, Pakistan, and the U.S., as the new Prime Minister, significant damage had already been done to Afghanistan's fragile democracy.[90]

The 1967 War

On the morning of June 5, 1967, two hundred Israeli aircraft staged a pre-emptive attack on eleven airbases across Egypt: the Six-Day War had begun. In the early hours of the conflict, the defiant statements of Gamal Abdel Nasser and other Arab leaders dominated the airwaves. One listener to these reports was a fourteen-year-old named Ahmad Shah, the son of one of the most prominent Panjsheris, an army colonel named Dost Mohammad. He stayed up late with his father on the six nights of the war listening to BBC accounts of the battles. From a young age, Ahmad Shah had shown a keen interest in the military, often putting on Dost Mohammad's army hat — many sizes too big — and parading around the family's house. But it was the Arab-Israeli war that gave him his first opportunity to explore the subject in a concrete way. At school for a number of days during and after the war, when teachers would leave the classroom for recess, Ahmad Shah's classmates would remain seated as he began a

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[90]Anthony Arnold states that "the PDPA had crossed over from legitimate (if only quasi-legal) political activity within a democratic framework to calls for violence against the established order and disruption of the democratic process," Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism: Parcham and Khalq (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1983), p. 33.

blackboard presentation on the previous day's developments.[91]

Perhaps even more noteworthy than Ahmad Shah's introduction to military operations was his exposure to the ideas of Islamic nationalism. Suddenly he was no longer limited by being a Tajik or even an Afghan: he was a member of an Islamic community, and the exploits of Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian forces fighting several thousand miles away were deeds that he felt reflected on him. Even when the success of the Israeli air campaign had been grasped, young Ahmad Shah, though saddened, was not dispirited. He had found a broader context in which to express his political identity as a minority Afghan Persian. In the anti-nationalistic climate that had been created by the escalating Soviet subversion in the late 1960s in Kabul, the idea that an Islamic state could effectively challenge developed countries such as Israel gave the young Afghan hope vis-à-vis the challenges his own country faced.

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[91] Interview with Ahmad Zia, February 1992.

Chapter 2, Origins of a Nationalist Resistance Movement: Reaction to Soviet Encroachment, July 1973-March 1978.

The Muslim Youth

For the four years following the 1967 War, Ahmad Shah continued his studies at the French-run Lycée Istiqlal in Kabul where, in addition to receiving a Western education, he became involved in the Muslim Youth Movement, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, formally organized at Kabul University in the spring of 1969. Created in *reaction* to the foreign-supported socialist movements of Babrak Karmal and others, this new movement, led by a law student by the name of Abdur Rahim Niazi, seems at its inception to have "offered a bulwark against what appeared in the concentrated atmosphere of the university to be a tidal wave of [anti-nationalist] atheistic behavior."[1] Spurred both by the Communist subversion of Afghanistan's constitutional movement in 1965 and "the petty annoyances of the leftist students," Niazi's organization stepped up their outreach to various national groups in the last year of the decade, precipitating a schism with several radical Pashtun members, in particular, a soon-to-be-infamous one, named Gulbuddin.

By the time Ahmad Shah enrolled in the Kabul Polytechnic in the fall of 1972, Abdur Rahim Niazi had been dead for over two years. Although his death was

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[1] David B. Edwards, Before Taliban: Genealogies of the Afghan Jihad (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 203.

publicly attributed to leukemia, a few supporters wondered if Gulbuddin, who over the course of the war was responsible for the killing of scores of nationalist leaders, had murdered him.[2] Following Niazi's death, another Polytechnic student, engineer Abdur Rahman, assumed leadership of the nationalist faction of the "Iqani" youth movement, as it became known. The bright and outgoing Abdur Rahman appears to have quickly adopted Ahmad Shah as one of his principal deputies. In this way, Ahmad Shah, who had been encouraged by his father to pursue a course in civil engineering, found himself, just months out of college, at the very centre of a rapidly emerging nationalist movement.[3]

From 1972 to 1973, both of the then separate wings of the Afghan Communist party, Khalq and Parcham, enjoyed tremendous freedom under the government of Nur Ahmad Etemadi.[4] Though all opposition organizations were banned from conducting public rallies after a suspicious massacre had taken place in front of Prime Minister Yousuf's house in 1965, few if any Communist Party members remained incarcerated. However, the Khalq faction appears to have continued to actively recruit junior and mid-level officers from within the military.

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[2] Ayoub interview, 12 December 2004, p. 5.
[3] Ahmad Wali interview, June 1992.
[4] M. Hassan Kakar, Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979-1982 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 11; Dupree, Afghanistan, pp. 649, 692.

This practice was largely facilitated by the training of Afghan military personnel by the Soviet Red Army following the countries' 1955 agreement. Henry Bradsher considers the primary cause of the underlying weakness in Afghanistan to have been the "failure to develop in the late 1950s some system to meet the possible dangers of a Soviet military relationship. It was a problem that continued [after Daoud's 1963 resignation] by the leaders who succeeded him."[5] Even after forty years on the throne, Zahir Shah appears to have had little appreciation for the effect that eighteen years of Soviet penetration was increasingly having on the Afghan military.[6]

The Military Coup

On June 25, 1973, the Shah left Afghanistan for Italy, where he was scheduled to undergo eye treatment and then a round of mud baths in the town of Ischia. In his absence, power was to be held by his cousin, General Abdul Wali, commander of the army's Central Corps. The previous year the Shah had finally appointed a Prime Minister, Mohammad Musa Shafiq, who, it appeared, would actively challenge Prince Daoud, whose Communist supporters remained

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[5] Bradsher, Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention, p. 27.
[6] Scores of complaints and allegations by nationalist Afghan officers like Dost Mohammad about the Communists' recruitment within the armed forces did little to stem the trend, Dost Mohammad Khan interview, February 1992.

politically active.[7] Bidding farewell, the monarch announced that he would return from his vacation to Italy by the end of July. In fact, his return would take some twenty-nine years, as events in the long-tranquil kingdom were about to rapidly spiral out of control.

In the predawn hours of July 17, 1973, a small group of Communist military officers, supported by several hundred pro-leftist troops, stormed the Shah's palace. After a brief engagement in which eight guards were killed, the palace was captured. Simultaneous operations succeeded in capturing the state radio station, the international airport, and other strategic points in the capital. The rebels secured the arrest of General Wali and other members of the government.

That morning, an announcement was made over Kabul Radio that Afghanistan had become a republic. Minutes later, Prince Daoud went on the radio and, speaking in Pashtu, a language not understood by more than half of the country's citizens, charged that the monarchy had become a despotic regime and accused his cousin the Shah of undermining the country's interests. The following day it was announced that the now-Soviet-allied Prince Daoud had been "named" President and Prime Minister of the Republic

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[7] Kakar, Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979-1982, p. 11. Also see Dupree, Afghanistan, Appendix G, p. 693, in reference to the government that took power July 26, 1971.

of Afghanistan. It would be the first of four Communist-led coups to rock the country in the 1970s.[8]

For Ahmad Shah and the other Muslim Youth leaders, even more disturbing than the fact that Daoud had seized power was the method by which he had done it: his coup had been led by a handful of mid-level military officers, known to have links to the two Communist factions.[9]

Within days Habib-ur Rahman and Ahmad Shah had dropped out of the Polytechnic and gone underground to dedicate themselves full-time to the overthrow of the Daoud government.[10] In this enterprise, the student leaders appear to have had the encouragement of one extraordinary patron: the prominent Sufi cleric Maulana Muhammad 'Ataullah Faizani. Described by David Edwards as "one of the most interesting and enigmatic figures in contemporary Afghan history,"[11] Faizani's leadership, in the late 1960s, of the opposition to increasing Communist covert activities appears to have been a significant catalyst for the nationalistically-oriented movement in its critical early days. As one participant, Mohammad Ayoub, described the early days of the movement, "The main

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[8] The subsequent ones took place in April 1978, October 1979, and December 1979.

[9] Key individuals included Abdul Qadir, Aslam Watanjar, Pacha Gul, Faiz Mohammad, and Abdul Mustaghni. See Bradsher, Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention, p. 56.

[10] Though by the 1980s Jamiat Islami would turn against Zahir Shah, whom they correctly blamed for the country's woes, the movement's militant phase was specifically catalyzed by the monarch's overthrow, Ahmad Zia interview, January 1992. Also Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994.

[11] Edwards, Before Taliban, p. 229.

target of all the activity was to prevent Communist groups from spreading all over Afghanistan and taking power in Afghanistan":

> We were not doing activity to bring an Islamic government. At that time, there was no idea that we will throw out this kingdom and bring in Islamic Government as an era. There was no ideology like this, there was no idea of this at that time. Because we knew that, Afghanistan's people, everybody is Muslim. It was just a nationalist movement and a reaction against the Communists.[12]

Beyond Faizani's critical leadership of the early anti-Communist movement, in many ways he would become emblematic of the wellspring of individuals that would organize the first sophisticated acts of opposition to the Taraki government after its 1978 takeover. Whether he set the movement on a nationalist course by design, or was merely reacting to the country's cultural and demographic tendencies, Faizani was one of the first and most prominent of a group of educated, moderate, Persian-speaking, and traditionally-minded nationalists to step forward and resist the Soviet penetration of their country.[13]

Little has been written about this well-traveled and progressive dissident.[14] After studying in Kabul, Faizani

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[12]Ayoub interview, 12 December 2004, pp. 1, 3.

[13]Though Faizani's activism had initially focused on social inequities in Afghanistan, he appears to have shifted quickly to an anti-Communist focus after July 1973.

[14]Edwards describes Faizani's work as having a "hagiographic" quality, based primarily on the accounts of two of the Maulana's disciples, Before Taliban, p. 326, note 5. Despite this qualification, the breadth of Faizani's activities are confirmed by Engineer Es-Haq, Ahmad Shah Massoud and, to a limited extent, Olivier Roy, who has

began his career, at the age of 23, as a teacher in Herat. For several years thereafter, he traveled the Islamic world. At some point, in the tradition of his ancestors, a family of venerated clerics by the name of Miajan, Faizani is said to have spent three years of "purification" living in a cave. If true, the experience seems, as much as anything, to have convinced him of the inefficiency of traditional Sufi preparation. Eager to perpetuate the spiritual-political role played by his ancestors, Faizani recognized that Afghan mysticism had to change if it were to compete with modern ideologies. As Edwards concludes,

> Faizani was a man of the modern age as well. Educated and knowledgeable about science and technology, he differed from many traditional scholars and Sufis in wanting to integrate the spiritual and secular forms of knowledge. In a time of general decline for Sufism, when most of the established saintly families had lost their influence and clerics either ignored science or claimed it was an infidel trick, Faizani espoused a mythical theology that embraced science and technology as ways of understanding and appreciating God's creation.[15]

After returning to Afghanistan, Faizani settled in Mazar-i-Sharif, where he soon delivered a sermon denouncing the corruption of the ulama and the landed elite. It was to become his first political controversy and landed him in jail. After his release he moved to Baglan Province where

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acknowledged the important role played by Faizani but has also raised doubt about his significance. Roy writes that Faizani "was popularly supposed to have begun to establish a network in the army," implying that this suggestion is exaggerated, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 72.

[15] Edwards, Before Taliban, p. 229.

he established a Sufi centre near the town of Pul-i-Khumri, which for centuries had been the seat of the Ismaili order in Afghanistan. While it is not known what previous contact Faizani may have had with the Shiite Ismailis during his travels, the idea of a "progressive" Afghan Sufi nationalist operating with the support of the young, westernized, politically moderate, Agha Khan, who was based in Geneva, is remarkable.[16]

After several arrests, Faizani, like earlier Sufi nationalists, developed a significant following among teachers, students, and "mid-level military officers,"[17] and eventually settled in Kabul. Faizani is also thought to have been the person who encouraged Abdur Rahim Niazi to enroll in Kabul University and formally organize the Muslim Youth Movement there.[18]

It is also known that engineer Habib-ur Rahman, who succeeded Niazi, was a Faizani supporter and was a frequent visitor to the library in Pul-i-Khishti that Faizani established after his release from the jail where he had been incarcerated following his instigation of the 1969 Pul-i-Khishti demonstration. Rahman, a nationalist who resented Daoud's push for Pashtun separatism,

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[16]The Agha Khan is the leader of the Ismaili sect. Karim Agha Khan (Agha Khan IV) succeeded his grandfather, Mohammed Shah (Agha Khan III), in 1957 following his graduation from Harvard University. He later played a role in the founding of the New York-based Paris Review with his college roommate John Train. Train, a New York investment banker, would later organize and lead the Afghanistan Relief Committee during the Soviet War of the 1980s.

[17]Edwards, Before Taliban, p. 228.

[18]Ibid., p. 231.

identified with Faizani's inclusive approach towards politics.[19] In addition to being drawn to the fascinating, high-level political and military figures who frequented Faizani's library, the movement's young members would have also been attracted to Faizani's mainstream approach towards Sufi training.

The age of jet travel, the mystic claimed, enabled traditional Sufi spiritual preparation, or "zikr," to be greatly accelerated, so that with even a moderate commitment modern Sufis could benefit from the same type of zikr "powers" exercised by earlier adherents, without spending years of contemplation in caves. Politically sophisticated, Faizani recognized that Communism posed a powerful challenge to the Afghan nation; his approach was to streamline dramatically the process for entrance into his order and thus deputize the largest following possible. This was, as Edwards writes, "threatening to the traditional clerics not only because of his synthetic approach to spirituality and science but also because of his ecumenical openness to people of many backgrounds."[20] In other words, by widely commissioning Sufi practitioners and uniting unaffiliated segments of society, such as students, Shiite minorities and others, with influential

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[19] "Why we do not ask for the independence of Panjdeh," Habib-ur Rahman asked, referring to a former Afghan northwestern territory annexed by the Bolsheviks, in a speech critical of Daoud, "the same as we ask for the independence of Pashtunistan?" Speeches of Habib-ur Rahman (Tehran, Iran: Jamiat Islami Cultural Committee).

[20] Edwards, Before Taliban, p. 230.

government officials, Faizani developed a power base that quickly outstripped that of more conventional theologians. Daoud's Communist-backed coup offered him the chance to integrate this loose dissident-nationalist following (known by the early 1970s as *Hezb-i-Tauhid*) in an attempt to overthrow the new government.

Massoud recalled that his first contact after Daoud's assumption of power was with his brother-in-law, Mohammad Ghaus, and said that planning for the first coup "started under the leadership of Habib-ur Rahman."[21] It seems highly unlikely, however, that career military officers would entrust their lives to previously untested student leaders, making Massoud's recollection implausible. It is more probable that the three parties, all with strong links to the military, that had coalesced around Faizani to form Hezb-i-Tauhid, provided the critical support for the first coup attempt, and that only because of the youth leaders' later roles were they able to claim credit for "organizing" the event. The coup was scheduled to take place in September 1973, just four months after Daoud's takeover.

Despite secrecy and detailed planning, particularly within nationalist elements of the Air Force, the government uncovered the operation at an early stage.[22] Faizani, his leading supporter in the army General Mir

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[21]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 1.
[22]Ibid, p. 1.

Ahmad Shah Rizwani, and others, including a number of aligned Shi'a leaders, were arrested.[23] Most vexing for Ahmad Shah was the arrest of Habib-ur Rahman, who had recruited him to the Muslim Youth Movement at the Polytechnic and since that time had made him his key lieutenant. The arrests left Ahmad Shah, though barely through his first two years of college, as one of the top leaders of the Muslim Youth organization, which, through Faizani's efforts, was now directly linked to the military. Most likely it was at this point that Massoud's relationship, by marriage, to a respected Air Force pilot became key in integrating the anti-Communist officers into the youth movement.

Though Faizani's precise fate remains unknown, and his activism lasted only four months into Daoud's regime, his part in unifying the nationalist opposition and his possible links to the Geneva-based Agha Khan remain fascinating areas of study.[24] Olivier Roy suggests that Faizani's links to the military may have been exaggerated, yet he acknowledges the important role of the Pul-i-Khishti library; Roy's skepticism possibly resulted from his later contact with Peshawar-based leaders eager to

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[23]According to Ayoub, in addition to Faizani seventeen men from the army and air force and several students were arrested, Ayoub interview, 12 December 2004, p. 10.

[24]It is known that Faizani was still alive in 1979. Ambassador Ravan Farhadi, who was detained in Pul-i-Charkhi prison for some twenty months beginning in 1979, says that he met him two or three times, Farhadi interview, 8 December 2004. Based on this account, it seems probable that Faizani was executed after the Soviet invasion.

garner credit for themselves for the movement's origins.[25] Certainly Edwards' account of the nationalist leader whom he calls the "last Sufi" is consistent with the traditional-nationalist and culturally-Persian leadership of the resistance during the succeeding six years.[26] Only after the Soviet intervention would anti-nationalist Pashtuns, more interested in bolstering their own group's position and significantly supported by outside powers, seize the initiative, thus diminishing the nationalist characteristics of the resistance that were present at its creation.

The Rise of Ahmad Shah

Already in hiding at the time of the first of the coup attempts, Ahmad Shah continued to make occasional visits to his family's home, but only at night and with extreme caution, as some of his relatives held jobs in the government and were under pressure to reveal his whereabouts.[27]

Ahmad Shah's family appears to have maintained a somewhat close link to its native Panjsher Valley. Dost Mohammad, long absent from his village of Jangalak, began

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[25]Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 72.
[26]Though none of the four men highlighted in the remainder of this chapter — Mohammad Anwar Amin, Samiullah Safi Wakil, Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ismail Khan — were ever necessarily members of Hezb-i-Tauhid, or specifically practitioners of mysticism, all, like Faizani, were Persian-speaking nationalists with strong traditional beliefs.
[27]Wali Massoud interview, September 1992.

playing a more active role there after his retirement from the military in 1972.[28] The family often travelled to the Panjsher on weekends, and stayed for longer periods during the summer when Ahmad Shah's younger brothers and sisters were not in school.[29]

As the expected hour of Ahmad Shah's arrival approached, two of his brothers, Ahmad Zia and Ahmad Wali, stood ready to open the gate to avoid his spending any unnecessary time on the street. Suddenly, a suspicious-looking car drove slowly past the house, circled the block once, and parked in an alley some fifty metres away. The men in the car appeared to be members of President Daoud's security service. After some discussion, the youngest brother, Ahmad Wali, was dispatched to the nearest bakery. The sight of a teenager buying bread around mealtime was hardly unusual in Kabul. Hesitating momentarily as he left the bakery, Wali scanned the street and, after seeing no sign of his brother, returned home.[30]

For the next several hours the family waited anxiously, taking turns at the window. Finally, one of them watched the suspicious car start and the security men, in typical Soviet form, drive off at high speed. The family barely had a chance to recover when there came a

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[28]Wali Massoud interview, September 1992; Dost Mohammad Khan interview, February 1993.
[29]Ahmad Zia interview, February 1993.
[30]Ahmad Wali interview, June 1995.

low knock at the gate. Wali opened it to find a grinning Ahmad Shah standing in the darkness.[31]

This story is interesting because it demonstrates several critical elements that would typify the early opposition movement: the intense political tension in Kabul following the 1973 Communist-backed coup; the tough survival instincts that the militants had acquired – in the case of Ahmad Shah, only two years out of high school; and perhaps most significantly, the remarkable resolve of the militants' families in supporting activities that they believed were in the nation's interest and therefore worthy of significant risks and sacrifice.

The August 1974 Coup Attempt

On one of his clandestine visits home, Ahmad Shah announced that given Faizani's arrest and the Communists' strong position in the army, the *Ikhwanis* were initiating their own efforts to recruit trustworthy military officers.[32] Though still just over twenty years old, Ahmad Shah had volunteered as a leader of the new clandestine effort. If satisfied with his own assignment, he must have been discouraged to find that in place of Habib-ur Rahman, the second operation would be led by the increasingly radical youth leader Gulbuddin. Several

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[31] Ibid.

[32] The Arabic *Ikhwan* means brotherhood. The Egyptian party "Ikhwan-Ul-Muslimin" has become known in the West as the Islamic Brotherhood.

years Ahmad Shah's senior, Gulbuddin seems to have dominated the planning of this second attempt - a fact that, in light of later events, raises suspicions about his role in the plot's disclosure. Ahmad Shah was responsible for making contacts with the military. He was selected "because of his family, of course," Ayoub said years later. "The whole family were military officers.... If you don't have anybody from family, how you can contact them?"[33] Ahmad Shah's brother-in-law, Jagran (Major) Mohammad Ghaus, became a key player, helping to recruit other air force and army officers to support the operation.[34] Even though he was nearly ten years older, Ghaus seems to have had much respect for his brother-in-law and to have been able to convince large numbers of military officers to support the effort, unaware of Gulbuddin's unreliability. There is no evidence that Massoud's father, Dagerwal (Colonel) Dost Mohammad, played any role in, or even knew about, the planning for the 1974 coup attempt, though the fact that he was a well-known individual certainly assisted their effort.

Once again, however, the coup plan was discovered in its early stages, leading to the arrest of about three

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[33]Ayoub interview, 12 December 2004, p. 14.
[34]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 1. "The next attempt for a coup was made. Of course, at this time Hekmatyar instead of Habib-ur-Rahman arranged the affairs. He was not responsible for the party organization. He was in charge of drafting and meeting army officers."

hundred military officers.[35] The disclosure in part seems to have been made by an army officer who attended a meeting of the coup plotters and "taped all the meeting and took it to the government."[36] Daoud later promoted the officer, making him commander of the Mahtaw-Qala area.[37]

Among those arrested were Professor Abdul Sayyaf, one of the leading Islamic scholars in Kabul at the time, as well as Mohammad Ghaus, and his close friend Agha Gul, a lieutenant in the Kabul Gendarme.[38] Mohammad Ghaus was not heard from for a number of days and, following Habib-ur Rahman's disappearance the previous year, Ahmad Shah and his family must have assumed the worst. In Badakhshan Province, the militant leader, Dr. Omar, together with more than one hundred students, were also apprehended after the failed plan and many were summarily executed. "Hundreds of students moved to Badakhshan in the north and a number of them to the south," Massoud recalled. "Many often were caught by the local people and handed over to the government. The person responsible for this in the north was Dr. Omar, one of the famous men. He was also arrested."[39]

After hiding for more than a week, Ahmad Shah was warned by another student leader, Jan Mohammad, to flee

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[35] Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 1.
[36] Ayoub interview, 12 December 2004, p. 13.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Agha Gul said that out of three hundred who were arrested, five were released: himself, Mohammad Ghaus, Sayyaf, Najmuddin and Dr. Sams from Laghman, Agha Gul interview, 15 June 1995.
[39] Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 2.

the capital.[40] The two soon managed to reach the edge of town, and Ahmad Shah caught a ride with a truck headed down the Kabul Gorge towards the Pakistani border.

Flight to Peshawar and the Formation of Hezb-i-Islami

Upon reaching Peshawar, Ahmad Shah was reunited with his close friends Ayoub, Rahmanyar, and Jan Mohammad.[41] Several days later Gulbuddin, who had adopted the code name "Hekmatyar," arrived, as other student leaders trickled in. This group of exiles grew to more than twenty persons.[42] "A lot of our friends were captured," Ayoub recalled. "And we left our fathers, mothers, relatives, our jobs, everything. Just we went to Pakistan alone."[43] Although the militants did not immediately realize it, one of the most respected of the Persian activist-scholar theologians, Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, had also secretly arrived in Peshawar, and later moved in with Gulbuddin.[44]

The capital of the North-West Frontier Province and culturally the seat of the Ghilzai-Pashtuns, Peshawar was very different from Kabul. It was a city in which the

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[40] Ibid.
[41] Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 2. It is not known when Jan Mohammad reached Pakistan, but Es-Haq said that when he arrived in Pakistan in 1975, Massoud, Jan Mohammad and others were there. Engineer Es-Haq interview, 5 October 1994, p.1.
[42] Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 2.
[43] Ayoub interview, 12 December 2004, p. 19.
[44] "There was one house that we were reaching there, and there was another house that was Ustad Rabbani and Habib Rahman – Mawlawi Habib Rahman – Gulbuddin and Mohmad Gul Pilot." Ayoub interview, 12 December 2004, pp. 18-19.

young Persian-speaking Afghans were clearly outsiders. "There was no rest, because at that time Peshawar was very, very hot," Ayoub said. "And we were not familiar with this type of hot weather. [In our house] there were two rooms. There was no fan in the ceiling. We had only one small fan in one side, and when we plugged it into the electricity it was making noise: rrrrrrrrrr."[45]

Ahmad Shah, along with a number of Ikhwani members, joined Gulbuddin to form a new political party which they named "Hezb-i-Islami," or the Party of Islam. Their exile and involvement in planning military operations apparently led the militants, still in their early twenties, to feel they had outgrown the "Muslim Youth" label by which they had been known in Kabul. Gulbuddin was recognized as the new party's chief, replacing Habib-ur Rahman, whom the militants learned had been executed after the first coup attempt. Rebuffed by Gulbuddin for his leading role in the failed second coup attempt, Ahmad Shah resigned himself to a junior position in the new organization.[46]

Significantly, while the two Communist factions in Kabul had adopted rigid organizational structures with hierarchical layers and lengthy titles, the Islamists eschewed formalities and chose a looser organization

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[45]Ayoub interview, 12 December 2004, p. 19.

[46]Gulbuddin had been the overall leader of the previous coup attempt, but Ahmad Shah had done much of the planning with the military. Gulbuddin used the opportunity created by the failure of the coup attempt to push Ahmad Shah out of the way.

modeled on Afghanistan's traditional practice of decision-by-consensus, typified by the institution of the *Shura*, or local assembly. The root of this difference was clear: while the Communists identified with Soviet-type centralization, equating "foreign" with "good," the Islamists were inspired mainly by historical Afghan personalities - men such as Mullah Hadda, Sultan Muhammad Khan and Mir Bacha Khan, who had fought for the independence of the Afghan nation.[47] The new "Hezb" members attempted to bridge rapidly diverging Pashtun radical and traditional nationalist positions, a divide that in many ways mirrored the anti-nationalist, pro-Pashtunistan stance Daoud had taken in the 1950s and the subsequent nationalist-oriented parliamentary period during the 1960s. Similar divisions also took place within the Communist party itself between the pragmatic, urban, Persian-speaking "Parcham" wing and the radical and divisive Pashtun "Khalq" faction.

For Ahmad Shah and the more nationalistically-minded members of the group, lingering suspicions about Gulbuddin's radicalism in the early 1970s and his possible role in Niazi's death in 1970 were not abated by the new leader's first steps in Peshawar. It was soon learned that, without the consent of the other group members, he

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[47]See Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, pp. 59-60, and Edwards, Heroes of the Age, pp. 1-32.

had contacted the Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence, known as the ISI.[48]

More divisive than any other issue confronted by the Afghan opposition in the Daoud era, was cooperation with the ISI; it cut accross the emerging "nationalist" versus "radicalist" divide. By 1975 the radicals had come to favour Pan-Ghilzai politics, recognizing that such efforts weakened Afghanistan's traditional Durrani-Persian alliance on which Timur Shah, Dost Mohammad, Abdul Rahman and others had built their nation. The radicals' position fit perfectly with that of the ISI, whose opposition to the Daoud regime was also specifically intended to serve an anti-Afghan-nationalist agenda, which by the mid-1970s had become a top Pakistani strategic priority.

Following three wars with India (1947-1948, 1965 and 1971), the Pakistanis had come to be paranoid about having a strong state on their Western flank. By the 1970s, the respective seventeenth- and eighteenth-century policies of Persia and the Moguls that Gregorian writes about had evolved, west of the Durand line, into a Persian-based Afghan state and, to the east, into a lawless culture characterized by continued cycles of subsidies and punitive strikes from the Punjab (since 1947 the state of Pakistan).[49] It is a dynamic that continues to this day.

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[48]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, pp. 2-3.
[49]See Gregorian, The Emergence of Modern Afghanistan: Politics of Reform and Modernization, 1880-1946, pp. 39-51. See also Anonymous

In addition to perpetuating an inherited policy towards Afghanistan, Pakistani President Ali Bhutto may have also perceived a tactical opportunity in using the opposition as a "tool for countering any new Pashtunistan pressure" from Daoud.[50]

But it was Pakistan's perceived strategic interests, well established by 1975, that were in fundamental opposition to the objectives of Faizani, Niazi and others who sought to restore Afghanistan's national, and Persian, culture, as they hoped to address the decadence of the ruling elite which they (and the leftists) blamed for the country's continuing underdevelopment twenty years after the initiation of significant international aid.

These individuals sought to restore a strong Afghan national government by reintroducing traditional Islamic principles, which had been in ebb since the beginning of Soviet penetration in 1955. Gulbuddin's willingness to ally himself with the ISI and, in part because of shared Pashtun ethnicity, to subordinate Afghan interests to Bhutto's generals, was similar to the bribes his ancestors had accepted from the Moguls to attempt to block systemic

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(Michael Scheuer), Imperial Hubris: Why the West Is Losing the War on Terror (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, Inc., 2004), p. 54. The author writes that since the subcontinent was partitioned in 1947, one of Pakistan's "three paramount and nonnegotiable security concerns" has been "ensuring to the greatest exent possible that a friendly, Pashtun-dominated government rules in Kabul."

[50] Bradsher, Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention, p. 17. This was of course in conflict with the nationalist segments of Hezb, though, despite this, Gulbuddin quickly made a unilateral alliance with the foreign intelligence service. See also Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 75.

Persian hegemony in Kabul.[51] This put him on a collision course with the Durrani and Persian members of the emerging nationalist faction of his party, who, like their predecessors, were both more pragmatic and generally better educated than the Ghilzai. The Persian-speaking wing of the youth organization was by this time led by an individual named Jan Mohammad.[52]

After a year of living underground in Kabul, the militants found the tree-lined streets and sunny tea houses of Peshawar a great relief. Perhaps these luxuries and life without fear of arrest caused Ahmad Shah and others in his faction to overlook both the historically divergent views and the incidents of suspicious behaviour that separated them from Gulbuddin's radicals.

The stunning failures of the Islamists' two previous coup attempts, with dozens executed and hundreds in prison, left them without a significant following in Kabul. The group soon began planning a new plot against Prince Daoud's government that was to consist of a number of regional "popular uprisings" throughout Afghanistan. These local actions were intended to spur reluctant sympathizers in the military under General Mustaghni, the

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[51]The Afghans' dependence on Pakistan had resulted in the closing of the Afghan border in 1955 during an uprising of Pashtun tribes (allegedly inspired by then Prime Minister Daoud) and caused the virtual cessation of Afghan imports and exports for more than six months. The event illustrates the dramatic power the new eastern state had come to have over Afghanistan.

[52]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 6: "At that time Jan Mohammad was senior to me in the group."

Afghan Army Chief of Staff and former Communist party member who by this time was thought to be loyal to the opposition, to depose Daoud in the context of a nationwide campaign.[53]

Ahmad Shah, or "Massoud," was instructed to return to his native Panjsher Valley, along with a small group from Peshawar, to organize an uprising there. Other rebellions were supposed to occur simultaneously in Badakhshan, Paktia, and Nangahar Provinces.[54] In all, the militants spent nearly a year planning the operation and by the spring of 1975 were prepared to act. Ominously for the Persian speakers, Gulbuddin was placed in charge of relations with the army.[55]

The 1975 Uprising

At 10.00 hours on June 7, 1975, the Panjsher component of the operation was launched, according to schedule. Militants burst into the Panjsher Valley District Headquarters in the town of Rukha some twenty-five miles up the valley and captured five or six soldiers and a number of weapons. After securing the building, Massoud, whose father was one of the most prominent men in the valley and whose mother grew up in Rukha, walked outside. He announced to a small crowd gathering there that a coup

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[53] Ibid., p. 6.
[54] Es-Haq interview, 5 October 1994, p.10; Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 75.
[55] Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994.

led by a group of patriotic military officers was at that moment taking place in Kabul, and that they should return to their houses and wait for a formal announcement by the new government over Radio Kabul.[56] Apparently somewhat bemused, the crowd dispersed. While small operations were conducted at the same time in Paktia and Badakhshan Provinces, the military coup in Kabul never got off the ground and, based on the evidence, probably never came close to materializing. In retrospect, Massoud and the others were rather naïve to take such risks without verifying that all other operations would occur as planned.

Several hours after the capture of the police headquarters, with still no word from Radio Kabul, a mob of armed and angry villagers surrounded the building. Several grim minutes elapsed for the young militants until, faced with few options, Massoud ordered his men to charge. Rifles blazing, the militants fled through a side door as the surprised villagers dove for cover. Massoud and Dr. Latif, another prominent militant leader, left last. "Thousands of people surrounding the Woluswali were shouting, 'Oh, catch them, they are Pakistanis,'" Massoud recalled. "Anyhow, we opened a way and the last persons who got out of there were me and Dr Latif."[57]

Intermittently returning fire, then advancing, several

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[56] Ibid., p. 5.
[57] Ibid., p. 5.

militants were wounded and two others killed as they shot their way out of Rukha.[58] It took Massoud and the rest of the group about thirty minutes to clear the town and escape into the safety of the mountains behind it. There, with the help of one of Massoud's family's trusted servants who brought them food every day, the militants hid in a cave near a spring above the village of Jangalak for a week before heading to a relative's house in Rukha and then to another house for two months.[59] A couple of weeks later, Daoud's security forces halted their intensive search.[60]

Split of Hezb

Returning to Peshawar, Massoud was furious. The failure of the 1975 coup seemed linked to the extraordinary treachery of Gulbuddin. With only a few men killed or captured, the Panjsher group had fared comparatively well. In Kabul and Laghman, groups led by Abdul Haq and Mawlawi Habib-ur Rahman, respectively, "attempted to incite the people," but were suppressed, with dozens killed and arrested. Also, those operations appear at least, militarily, to have been less effective; as Roy recounts, "only in the north-east [Panjsher Valley] was there

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[58] Ibid., p. 5.
[59] Es-Haq interview, 5 October 1994.
[60] Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 5; Ahmad Wali interview, March 1995.

anything approaching an uprising."[61] Once again the Persian Tajiks were taking a disproportionate role in attempting to restore their country to its historical nationalist equilibrium.

At best, Gulbuddin was guilty of incredible negligence after taking charge of all communications with the military, issuing a date and time for the operation, and then failing to notify any of the three regional groups when, as he claimed, his talks with the army ran into trouble.[62] Many came to believe, however, that the operation was a sham from the outset and that Gulbuddin had conceived of the exercise simply to eliminate some of the key Persian-speaking nationalists in Kabul, Laghman and the Panjsher Valley. Suddenly Niazi's 1970 case of "leukemia" and his death shortly thereafter seemed more suspicious. Ayoub, in his account, stated:

> Gulbuddin told lies to everybody. That he had prepared the military, there will be a coup, just we will do some disturbance all around Afghanistan, until the army be ready to give arms to followers, soldiers, and do a coup. For this reason he sent everybody inside [the country]...
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> When everybody came back, we told him that, 'You are telling lies, you are no military [liaison], you just send our friends to be killed.' Because Mawlawi Habib Rahman was captured in Laghman with some friend, he was killed. And also there was some uprising in Shinwar area, those people also escaped to Pakistan. And Panjsher, some friend was killed and captured. As well as in Konar, and there is no military nothing

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[61] Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 75.
[62] Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 5.

uprising].[63]

Within several weeks of his return to Peshawar, Massoud and a large number of the nationalists broke with Gulbuddin and formed a new group led by veteran Ikhwani activist Jan Mohammad and Engineer Ayoub.[64] Ayoub recalled: "I also told him [Gulbuddin], 'You told me that General Mustaghni is with us, where is Mustaghni?' Then he doesn't have any answer, but Pakistan ISI was supporting him in this action. For this reason then we were not able to do anything. Just after that, separation begins."[65]

The nationalist offshoot was called "Jamiat-i-Islami," or Islamic Society.[66] As he had with Habib-ur Rahman, Massoud seems to have quickly become one of the principal deputies of Jan Mohammad, who had become the group's leader. Later, after arriving in Peshawar from Saudi Arabia, Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani, a well-known Tajik Islamic scholar, came to be recognized as Jamiat's spiritual and titular head.[67] In addition to his age and his reputation as a theologian, Rabbani had a number of

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[63]Ayoub interview, 12 December 2004, pp. 20, 23.
[64]Engineer Es-Haq interview, 5 October 1994, p. 1: "Perhaps there was friction before, but the summer uprising gave opportunity to publicly admit the problem." Ayoub said alternately that the split happened "a couple of months" or "six or seven months" after Massoud and the other militants returned to Peshawar, Ayoub interview, 12 December 2004, pp. 23, 24.
[65]Ayoub interview, 12 December 2004, p. 23.
[66]As opposed to "Hezb-i-Islami," or Islamic Party.
[67]There is some disagreement about the leadership. Ayoub seems to say that at the time of the split Rabbani was the leader, not Jan Mohammad. For example, Ayoub asserted that "Everything was Ustad Rabbani," Ayoub interview, 12 December 2004, p. 26.

close ties with the Saudi royal family and seems to have been able to raise funds quickly for the new group, which was unable to depend on the Pakistanis.

Similar to the more moderate Parcham faction of the Communist party, which was put into power at the time of the 1979 Soviet intervention, Jamiat was comprised largely of ethnic Tajiks and urban Pashtuns, many of whom did not even speak Pashtu.[68] The new group was at a significant cultural disadvantage to the Hezbis in dealing with Pakistan's ISI. The ISI had staffed its Afghan Department with Pakistani Pashtuns who quickly became entwined in Gulbuddin's party. Whether the ISI played a role in the intrigue surrounding the 1975 coup attempt, as Ayoub suggested, is not known. The hostility towards the nationalists, however — partially a result of the anti-Tajik-nationalist nature of Pakistani interests — convinced Jan Mohammad and Massoud that the sooner they leave Pakistan, the better.[69]

Conception of the Panjsher Strategy

The bungled 1975 coup attempt caused Massoud, Rabbani, and the other nationalists to believe that the way to topple Daoud was through a series of regional insurgencies rather than a central military coup, which would be extremely

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[68]The fact that Rabbani was from Badakhshan, a Tajik province, may have limited Pashtun membership in the group.
[69]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 6.

difficult to keep secret because of the domination of Soviet-trained personnel in the army. Thus in 1975 Jamiat resigned itself to pursuing a guerrilla strategy. This decision would eventually help to trigger the Soviet intervention and ten-year-long occupation.

An additional outcome of the 1975 operation was Massoud's realization of the possibilities of using the hundred-mile-long Panjsher Valley, his ancestral home, as a base for rebellion. Not only did he recognize the vital role that he personally could play there, drawing on the loyalty of certain kinsmen and acquaintances, but he also grasped the significance of Panjsher's geography and strategic location. With its interconnecting side valleys, such as the one through which his group had escaped from Rukha in 1975, the terrain was well suited for waging a guerrilla campaign. More important, Panjsher was ideally located to control the country's main north-south artery known as the Salang Highway.

Cherat Training Centre

The next two years, 1976 and 1977, provided time for Massoud and the others in Peshawar to contemplate their next move. During this period, the militants trained themselves mentally and physically in an unprecedented manner. They read the works of successful guerrilla leaders such as Che Guevara and Mao Tse-tung; made contact

with foreign opposition movements such as the African National Congress;[70] studied weapons manuals; and became proficient in the martial arts. Many of them, including Massoud, studied at the Pakistani Paramilitary Centre at Cherat, south of Peshawar, which was run by the ISI.[71] Though still hostile to Jamiat's nationalist motives, the ISI instructors were impressed with Massoud's ability: after he completed the first course, they hired him as an instructor.[72] Unable to tolerate the Pakistanis' manipulation of the Afghan militants or the poor state of affairs at the training camp, he quit the job only a few months later.

"We fired four or five shots from old rusted revolvers of which we were not able to pull the [trigger] even with two hands," Massoud later complained.[73] "They did not teach us tactics." He considered Cherat to be more a terrorist training school than a paramilitary program that could help build an effective front like that of the Viet Minh.

Also, the problem of Gulbuddin continued. While the instructors at Cherat recognized Massoud's talents, their bosses at the ISI were just beginning their courtship of Gulbuddin. He was exactly what they wanted: an extremist Ghilzai Pashtun without any following inside Afghanistan;

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[70]Es-Haq interview, 5 October 1994.
[71]Ibid., p. 2.
[72]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 3.
[73]Ibid., p. 3.

someone who would fiercely attack opponents and had public relations potential but who, politically, would remain dependent on them.[74]

Leaving Cherat in mid-1976, Massoud returned to Peshawar where he resumed his study of history, military tactics, and other relevant subjects such as political Islam.[75] During this period the differences with the radicals escalated. In 1977, Jan Mohammad was arrested by the ISI and imprisoned on a Pakistani military base.[76]

"They first captured Gul Mohammad," Ayoub recalled, "then Jan Mohammad, and then there was another person, a student, I forgot his name, three persons were captured. They were from Konar."[77] Regarding Jan Mohammad's fate, Ayoub said:

> This much we know, that they killed him someplace. Hezb and ISI, both of them. Hezb killed him, in [an] ISI area, not away [from the purview of ISI officers]. Because after that we tried a lot — I tried to convince General Fazel-Haq too much to interrogate about [Jan Mohammad's disappearance]. They didn't.[78]

The Persian-speaking nationalists found the ISI and Hezb partnership only slightly weakened after Zia ul-Haq's coup. One day the Hezb's deputy leader Qazi Amin and a Pakistani agent attempted to arrest Massoud at the house of the governor of the North-West Frontier Province.

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[74] Ibid., p. 6.
[75] Ibid., p. 3.
[76] Ibid., p. 7.
[77] Ayoub interview, 12 December 2004 p. 31.
[78] Ibid., p. 32.

After a three-hour standoff, Massoud, who made use of a concealed pistol at the time of the attempted arrest, was freed when another senior Jamiat member, Ayoub, arrived.[79] That Pakistani operatives were, by that time, openly supporting Gulbuddin in his repression of his nationalist rivals indicates both the depth of the schism between the radicals and the nationalists and the ISI's commitment to widening it. According to Ayoub, "Gulbuddin told him [the governor] that, 'I'm working for you against [the] government. These people are destroying me, not letting me do the work. Just eliminate them.'"[80]

Jamiat, composed mainly of ethnic Tajiks, whose ancestors had been brought into the national process by the Barakzai-Qizilbash dynasty in the nineteenth century, was dismissed by Gulbuddin and the Pakistanis as an "insignificant" national group. Similar arguments were made about the Afghanistan Communist Party's less radical Parcham wing by the Khalq faction, which was made up of radical Pashtuns much like Hezb.[81] Hezb's representation as the rebels' "dominant faction" was strengthened by numerous flawed British studies of the culturally Persian Afghan state, conducted from the east side of the Durand

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[79]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 7. According to Ayoub's account, Massoud was being held at the governor's house and Ayoub convinced the government officials to let Massoud go. Ayoub did not recall Massoud having a pistol, Ayoub interview, 12 December 2004, pp. 29-30.

[80]Ayoub interview, 12 December 2004, p. 30.

[81]The fact that the Hezb-Khalq comparison has rarely, if ever, been made demonstrates the degree to which the realities of Hezb and radicalism within the resistance have been ignored by researchers.

line.[82] There, in the cantons of places like Peshawar and Quetta – the heartland of Pashtunistan – it was easy to misinterpret Afghanistan as a Pashtun state in origin and essence. As Chapter 1 recounts, this was not the case. In fact, the Khalq faction was soon to prove inept in public administration, and the desire by the Soviets to install the more learned Persian "Parcham" faction was a specific goal of the December 1979 intervention.[83] Although numerous educated nationalist Pashtuns joined Jamiat, as they had Parcham, the anti-nationalist role which the ISI played as early as 1977 significantly limited the manifestation of the traditional Durrani-Persian alliance that directly dated back to Shah Abbas in the seventeenth century.[84]

The Daoud-Brezhnev Meeting

As he landed in Moscow on April 12, 1977, President Daoud knew that he could expect a tough series of meetings with Secretary General Leonid Brezhnev. Over the previous

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[82] Olaf Caroe's The Pathans is considered a definitive work on the country, as is Fraser-Tytler's Afghanistan: A Study of Political Developments in Central and Southern Asia, which was also largely composed by research conducted from within India.

[83] Thomas J. Barfield provides a detailed analysis of the managerial shortcomings of the Communist regime in the initial phase after taking power. See Barfield, "Weak Links on a Rusty Chain: Structural Weaknesses in Afghanistan's Provincial Administration," in M. Nazif Shahrani and Robert L. Canfield (eds.), Revolutions and Rebellions in Afghanistan (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1984), pp. 170-83. Despite committing gross humanitarian atrocities, Parcham was far more moderate and competent in public administration than Khalq had been. See Arnold, Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism, p. 104.

[84] Certainly Tajik and Pashtun nationalism entered into this equation as well; however, as we will see from the fierce manipulation witnessed in Nuristan, the ISI was as determined as Daoud to eliminate the threat of the traditionalist-nationalists.

year, Daoud had begun steering a political course 180 degrees from the one which Premier Kosygin had publicly suggested to him at their last meeting in June 1974.[85] For the USSR — engaged in a massive aid programme to Afghanistan which, by April 1978, would surpass the combined Arab and Western contributions to the country since World War I — such disobedience from a client state was unexpected and unacceptable.[86]

Publicly, Daoud's Kremlin talks ran smoothly and a joint communiqué was issued stating that they had occurred "in an atmosphere of friendship, trust, and understanding, and there was a circumstantial exchange of opinions on urgent world problems." As several participants acknowledged, the staid diplomatic prose concealed a much more tumultuous reality.

Former CIA analyst Henry Bradsher has pieced together the main points of Brezhnev's comments to Daoud in his book, Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention, and they are largely corroborated by former Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Abdul Samad Ghaus, who was present. As Bradsher recounts:

> The Soviet leader reportedly complained to Daoud about the composition of his new cabinet, accusing some of its members of working for foreigners — implicitly, for the United States — and saying that new men should be brought into the government who better represent the

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[85]Bradsher, Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention, p. 64.

[86]For the Soviets a similar case of "disobedience" developed in Egypt in July 1972, when President Anwar Sadat expelled the Soviet units deployed in the country in 1970.

masses – again implicitly, [Khalq and Parcham] members. Brezhnev also asked for the expulsion of some American experts working in Afghanistan, including the satellite and seismological specialists, according to some accounts. And he was unhappy about Daoud's criticism of Cuba for trying to steer the nonaligned movement – of which Daoud had been an original founder in Belgrade in 1961 – in a pro-Soviet direction. There might have been other complaints.

> The basic point is that Brezhnev was trying to bully Daoud, the powerful Russian benefactor trying to influence or even control the policy of a weak Afghan nation. It might work with East Europeans or Mongolians, but Brezhnev had misjudged Daoud.[87]

"A chill fell on the room," Ghaus recalls. "Some of the Russians seemed visibly embarrassed and the Afghans appeared greatly displeased." Daoud then addressed Brezhnev and, after several platitudes, told him:

> We will never allow you to dictate to us how to run our country and whom to employ in Afghanistan. How and where we employ the foreign experts will remain the exclusive prerogative of the Afghan state. Afghanistan shall remain poor, if necessary, but free in its acts and decisions.

The Afghan president then stood and stiffly shook hands with the stunned Soviet officials before exiting the room.[88]

Once back in Kabul, Daoud instructed Ghaus to prepare a memorandum on expelling many of the Soviet advisors in Kabul who, by that time, were engaged in "unlawful

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[87] Bradsher, Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention, p. 73; see also Ralph H. Magnus and Eden Naby, Afghanistan: Mullah, Marx, and Mujahid (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), p. 121; Volgelsang, The Afghans, p. 301.

[88] 'Abdus Samad Ghaus, The Fall of Afghanistan: An Insider's Account (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1988), p. 179.

activities" which the Afghan president believed "had gone far above the tolerable level."[89] Had Daoud followed through on his nationalist instincts (as the more resolute Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat had five years earlier) and held a press conference divulging Brezhnev's aggressive behaviour and announcing the arrest of twenty to thirty of the most prominent Communists, he might well have averted the impending catastrophe. Instead, he ignored Ghaus' memorandum and, as the then-foreign minister later wrote, reverted to his decade-old mantra, brought on by repeated American snubs, that "the preservation of good relations with the Soviet Union was essential 'even if now and then the Russians make it difficult for us to do so.'"[90]

It is not known what effect Daoud's vacillation towards the USSR had on his brief November 1977 falling-out with his brother and trusted advisor Naim and six other ministers.[91] What is clear is that the only reports of the Moscow talks to reach the frustrated militants in Peshawar were from the official communiqué of sentiments, and it could have only reinforced their belief that Communist influence within the Afghan government was increasing.

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[89] Ibid., pp. 181-82.
[90] Ibid., p. 181.
[91] According to Bradsher, "Naim and six cabinet ministers broke with [Daoud] temporarily in 1977 over the inflexibility of his increasingly unrealistic policies," Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention, p. 22.

Daoud to Islamabad

On March 5, 1978, President Daoud flew to Islamabad for a meeting with President Zia ul-Haq. Nine months earlier, Zia, the soft-spoken former Chief of Staff, had deposed President Ali Bhutto. By most accounts, the meeting between the two leaders who had both come to power via coup d'etats was cordial; both presidents faced tense domestic political situations and quickly agreed that Afghanistan would crack down on the secessionist rhetoric from Pashtun leaders and expel radical Pakistanis, while Pakistan would release a number of dissidents from prison.[92]

It seems likely that Daoud raised the question of expelling the Afghan exiles from Pakistan, and that Zia rejected it.[93] If so, Daoud played down the diplomatic affront, as he had after his meeting with Brezhnev, and proclaimed that the agreement "opened a promising new chapter in the relations of our two countries."[94] In reality, the longtime Soviet-leaning prince was being squeezed by both his Communist allies and the nationalist opposition that their partnership had inadvertently

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[92] The protocol they signed that day had three basic provisions: a) Daoud agreed to pressure Afghan and Pakistani tribal leaders to "tone down the Pashtunistan and Baluch issues"; b) Zia would release from prison Pakistani political prisoners who had been arrested for opposing martial law rule; and c) Daoud would send home Pakistani political exiles.

[93] Bradsher, Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention, p. 63. The language of the agreement is not clear on whether President Daoud agreed to turn over the exiled Pakistani opponents to Zia's authorities or only require them to proceed to some third country.

[94] Bradsher, Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention, p. 63.

engendered; he was increasingly powerless to resist either. His trip to Pakistan would be his last visit abroad as, twenty-two years after his final rebuff by John Foster Dulles, events in the Afghan capital were about to overtake Mohammad Doaud's perennial optimism.

Chapter 3, War in Nuristan and Herat: The Outbreak of Nationalist Uprisings, April 1978-April 1979.

Death of Mir Akbar Khyber

On April 25, 1978, Agence France Press carried a brief report on the murder ten days earlier in Kabul of Mir Akbar Khyber, a prominent Afghan Communist. Quoting travellers arriving in Pakistan from the Afghan capital, the report mentioned that "many of the several thousand mourners waved red flags and shouted anti-CIA slogans." In the politically charged atmosphere of the time, it did not seem that unusual.

Shaken by the massive demonstrations, late on the same day as the AFP report, President Daoud finally ordered the arrest of the civilian leadership of the Communist factions.[1] Shortly after midnight, Nur Mohammad Taraki, Babrak Karmal and two dozen or so senior Communists were taken into custody, although Hafizulah Amin inexplicably was only placed under house arrest. That gave Amin almost twelve hours to finalize details of a plot among Communist agents in the military before he too was arrested, at 10:45 hours on the morning of April 26.[2]

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[1] Urban, War in Afghanistan, p. 7.
[2] Arnold, Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism, pp. 57-59.

The following day, President Daoud and his cabinet met at the Arg Palace to discuss the fate of the jailed Moscow-backed leaders. Several participants, including Minister of the Interior Abdul Qadir Nuristani, felt that with such an unstable situation, the government had little choice but to execute the leaders of the Communist groups immediately.[3] This position had a strong legal basis, as many of the men, such as Taraki and Amin, had been repeatedly involved in treasonous acts, all punishable by death under the 1977 constitution.[4] At the same time, some cabinet members were afraid of turning the men into martyrs; opponents of immediate execution argued that the previous week's protests by several thousand people might yield to protests by tens of thousands. With reports of chaos in Iran spreading around the world, the Afghan ministers feared a similar leftist-Islamic rage.[5]

More than an hour before these sensitive cabinet deliberations began, a column of approximately fifty tanks of the 4th Armoured Division had departed their base in Pul-i-Charkhi and headed for central Kabul, twelve

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[3] Arnold, Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism, p. 59. Also see Bradsher, Afghan Communism and Soviet Intervention, pp. 74-75.

[4] For a synopsis of the 1977 constitution, see Dupree, Afghanistan, p. 763.

[5] Protests against the Shah of Iran and in support of the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini erupted in numerous cities in early 1978. On January 9 in Qumm, the police fired on student protesters, killing scores. More demonstrators were killed during clashes with the police in Tabriz on February 18 and Yazd on March 30. In early April, students organized demonstrations at various schools in Tehran. Arnold states that "Khalq had gained the sympathy of the Iraqi Communist Party and Iran's Tudeh Party," Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism, p. 53.

kilometres to the east. Two hours later, battalion commander Senior Captain Aslam Watanjar led a company of nine tanks to the wrought-iron gates and stone walls of the presidential compound where Daoud and his ministers were meeting. Forming a battle line, the tanks opened fire on the compound's main building at noon on April 27, 1978.[6]

The blooming rose gardens of the palace were soon shrouded in smoke as the 1,800-man Presidential Guard counterattacked. Daoud and other members of the government frantically called bases around the capital to muster loyal forces. Their efforts were unsuccessful, raising serious questions about whether the Defence Minister, Ghulam Haidar Rasuli, was involved in the conspiracy. With a handful of light-armoured vehicles, the Presidential Guard, or Republican Guard Brigade, as it was officially known, could not match the heavy tanks. At about 15.00 hours, a few MiG-21s from the 322nd Air Regiment, which was supporting the coup, initiated a series of sorties over the mountain-ringed capital, strafing the Central Corps and 8th Division headquarters to intimidate the units, and bombing the palace.

Late that afternoon, pro-communist forces released Taraki, Karmal, Amin, and others from the National Security Ministry, adjacent to the besieged Palace.

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[6] Ewans, Afghanistan: A New History, p. 136; Guardian, 28 April 1978.

Shortly afterwards, rebel forces captured the lightly guarded Communications Ministry next to the U.S. Embassy on the outskirts of the new diplomatic quarter. At 19.00 hours, Radio Kabul announced "the takeover of the Afghan government by the Revolutionary Council of the Armed Forces."[7] Four hours later, rebel forces entered the palace and commenced a bloodbath that claimed the lives of President Daoud, his wife, six of their children ages fourteen to twenty-seven, and thirteen other immediate relatives.[8]

For two days after the coup, Afghans and the rest of the world waited to see what the Revolutionary Council of the Armed Forces would do next. On April 30, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) formed a government with Nur Mohammad Taraki as its Secretary General and President, and Hafizullah Amin as First Deputy Prime Minister. A document entitled "The Main Guidelines of the Revolutionary Tasks of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA)" soon made it clear that the PDPA intended to engage in radical social reforms, including the forced redistribution of land and the partial emancipation of women via a massive literacy campaign.

Although virtually all Afghans knew that the PDPA was "Communist," the new government assiduously avoided public mention of Marxist-Leninist ideals. Instead, it spoke

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[7] Urban, War in Afghanistan, p. 8.
[8] Ewans, Afghanistan: A New History, p. 136.

euphemistically about its desire "to clean Islam in Afghanistan of the dirt and ballast of bad traditions, superstition, and erroneous belief."[9]

To ordinary Afghans, however, this sophistry was of little significance. Particularly galling for them was Decree No. 6, issued on July 12, 1978, which cancelled all rural debts incurred prior to 1973. This theoretically freed millions of poor Afghan farmers from a vicious cycle of accumulating financial obligations to landlords and local money lenders. In practice, it had the effect of unhinging the largest sector of the Afghan economy — agriculture — by antagonizing a set of interests which the state had never before challenged. As one Nuristani put it:

> They dishonored, insulted and killed the tribal leaders, and told us that landowners and khans are the people's enemy and should be destroyed.... They told us that land is not private property. It belongs to the farmers, and the farmers are the government's hired workers.... They stole the farmers' labor under the pretext of co-operatives.[10]

This decree appears to have had a galvanizing effect on the populace and in particular on the Nuristanis.[11] Having been converted to Islam only by force of arms — by Abdur Rahman, the fifth Barakzai-Qizilbash Amir, in a conflict

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[9] Nur Taraki, Die Zeit, 9 June 1978, quoted in Urban, War in Afghanistan, p. 18.
[10] Edwards, Before Taliban, p. 135.
[11] Raja Anwar points out that "the religious establishment, headed by the Mullahs, was fully on the side of the threatened but powerful [landowning] minority," The Tragedy of Afghanistan: A First-Hand Account (New York: Verso, 1988), p. 146.

lasting from 1895-1898[12] – the Nuristanis did not consider themselves real Afghans, and therefore felt largely immune from the state's jurisdiction.

The government responded to the simmering discontent with the arrest of thousands of civil servants and intellectuals. This, however, had a rapid polarizing effect on the country. In the eastern town of Narang, the arrest of one sub-district administrator in particular would prove highly counterproductive.

The Arrest of Mohammad Anwar

Mohammad Anwar Amin arrived at his office one morning, several days after the announcement of the new government, to find an armoured jeep awaiting his arrival. An experienced and self-confident civil administrator, Anwar greeted the officers and inquired why they had come to see him, only to find himself arrested and transferred to the governor's house by machine-gun-toting guards and held there for a day before being moved to the Division Headquarters of Jalalabad. From there, after a brief but cordial conversation with the acting governor, whom he knew, he was loaded onto a bus full of terrified men.[13]

For Anwar, the experience was surreal. As he later recounted, "I wasn't aware that they killed, that these

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[12]See Schuyler Jones, Men of Influence in Nuristan: A Study of Social Control and Dispute Settlement in Wakil Valley, Afghanistan (London: Seminar Press, 1974), pp. 6-19.

[13]Richard F. Strand and author's interview with Mohammad Anwar Amin, February-March 1992, interview 2, p. 2.

Communists are tyrannical."[14] The realization seems to have shocked him, though he understood from experience that in dangerous situations it was necessary to remain calm and clear-headed. "What sins have we committed?" he asked rhetorically, attempting to put the men on the bus at ease. The answer was evident: they were senior government officials and prominent traditional leaders. The men soon found themselves in a prison outside of Jalalabad with two to three hundred other detainees, including the President of Jalalabad University and the city hospital's chief doctor. The presence of these well-known figures among samovars and plentiful tobacco, arrayed on carpet-covered daises, greatly heartened Anwar. "From now on these jails are rosebeds. They are flower gardens," he recalled them saying.[15] The illusion, however, was temporary.

Within days, the guards began calling names and removing prisoners at night. Anwar soon learned that many of the men were transferred to a site in the Gambiri Desert outside of Jalalabad and executed.[16] The fenced-in tea house became a living hell. On several nights, the guards called out his official title, "'Alaqadar," but Anwar remained still; he knew there were other 'Alaqadars in the jail.

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[14]Anwar interview 2, February-March 1992, p. 6.
[15]Ibid., p. 7.
[16]Ibid., pp. 8-9.

Anwar's elder brother, Ghazi, who had been detained soon after his own arrest, was also in the prison. After five months of witnessing scores of men taken to their deaths, even during daylight hours, kinsmen of the brothers successfully bribed PDPA officials in Jalalabad to release them. Meeting briefly with the Jalalabad Division Commander before being set free, Anwar pledged to "work cooperatively for [the PDPA] government." He then paid and tipped the local vendor, who had delivered fruit to him and washed his laundry while he was in detention, and purchased two pairs of sturdy hiking boots. A fierce nationalist, Anwar already had a conception of the rebellion he would soon lead.[17]

Anwar's Return

Mohammad Anwar had grown up in eastern Nuristan in the 1960s. At that time, his highland clan, the Kom, were engaged in a protracted, low-intensity conflict with the Gujar tribe, who for generations had encroached upon the Kom's grazing lands. In response to these land-grabs, scores of raids were launched on both sides as the Kom fought to preserve their holdings and the Gujars sought to increase theirs. Though the primary purpose of these raids may have been "the theft of goats rather than the killing of men,"[18] bloodshed nevertheless occurred and

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[17]Ibid., pp. 2-10, 23; Anwar interview 6, February-March 1992, p. 1.
[18]Jones, Men of Influence in Nuristan, p. 189.

these campaigns were pursued by both sides in a most serious manner.

Anwar was one of the principal Kom heroes to emerge from the last phase of the so-called Gujar Wars.[19] The experience endowed him with an acute sense of property rights and made him an expert in guerilla tactics, something that by 1978 was unusual among educated Afghans, the 1960s and 1970s having been an era of domestic tranquility. That this individual, something of an anachronism, had become educated, entered public service, and became a highly-respected 'Alaqadar, made him truly unique.[20]

Anwar returned to Nuristan in September 1978.[21] At the time, the border region, and Afghanistan as a whole, remained at peace even as its people seethed at the PDPA's actions. Reunited with his family in the town of Pashingar, Anwar rested several days before continuing up the valley to Kamdesh, where he anticipated a large welcome. Before leaving Pashingar, he warned his kinsmen

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[19]The conflict was eventually solved in the 1970s with the central government's penetration of the area and acceptance of the rule of law by both sides. This fact may have been a driving force in Anwar's later decision to seek a career in civil administration. See Richard Strand, Nuristan: Hidden Land of the Hindu-Kush, published online at http://users.sedona.net/~strand.

[20]In addition, while only a small percentage of the Afghan population was involved in the military during the twentieth century, every male in Nuristan from three to four preceding generations had some involvement in the three-year Afghan war, which lasted from 1895-1898. In April 1896, 2,500 Nuristani prisoners — men, women, and children — were taken to Kabul, while in ensuing fighting in Kamdesh, 440 Afghan soldiers drove some 3,000 souls into refugee camps in Nuristan. Among them were presumably many of Anwar's kinsmen. Jones, Men of Influence in Nuristan, pp. 16-18. The Safi War (1945-1946) renewed this cycle of combat.

[21]Anwar interview 3, February-March 1992, p. 4.

either to fight with him in the mountains or to flee the town for the safety of the lower regions.[22]

"During the Gujar affair, you were saying that I drowned you," Anwar told the kinsmen who had bought his freedom, employing a local colloquialism. "Now for this affair you shouldn't say that I drowned you. I am going to make war on the government."[23] Anwar's reputation from the Gujar Wars was significant and, idealistic as his declaration sounded, a number of the men, including his older brother Muhammad Kabir, a former member of the provincial Parliament, agreed to leave their homes and fight with him. An unsuccessful anti-Communist raid on Shigal the previous summer and the PDPA's subsequent burning of the town of Ningalam also significantly influenced the men.[24] The Pachwals clan from Ningalam had fled into Kom territory where they were given shelter, and this seems to have also inspired the Kom. Several of their fighters had joined the Pachwals in a raid on a government post at Manugi that July. At that point, however, in the midst of ongoing negotiations for the

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[22] Ibid., p. 5.

[23] Ibid., p. 6. Jones notes that even in modern Nuristan, "bravery and enterprise were honored as affording additional means of rank-achievement." Men of Influence in Nuristan, p. 188.

[24] Edwards says the raid on Shigal was carried out May 23, 1978, by inexperienced members of Hezb-i-Islami, and essentially involved the assassination of one communist schoolteacher, Before Taliban, p. 148. The burning of Ningalam, on June 23, 1978, was in retaliation for the previous day's shooting by town residents of a military officer and two soldiers who were arresting two Ningalam elders. The military attack involved tank and artillery fire, hours of bombing by the air force, and soldiers looting and burning down houses. Ibid, p. 128.

release of Anwar and his brother, veteran Kom fighters had chosen to bide their time.

The Outbreak of War

On one of his first mornings back in Kamdesh, Anwar dispatched a number of messengers to neighbouring villages, alerting them that he planned to launch an attack in ten days.[25] This delay, communicated to people in the Mer territory, Kamu, and the Piti Valley, was intended to give Anwar time to notify other kinsmen and loyalists in Kabul and allow them time to flee.[26] He also intended to use the time to plan carefully the first operation.

To Anwar's intense frustration, a young boy arrived in Kamdesh later that morning from the neighbouring Mer territory and announced that the men in his village had launched an assault. Apparently the Mer feared the arrest of one of their headmen, an ally of Anwar named Latif, and thus took pre-emptive action.[27] With little time to prepare, Anwar assembled the Kom men. He pointed out that the Communists had fined the people of the Kata Valley thirty cows. "How will you exist tomorrow as people without agnates [chiefs] or tribe?" the former 'Alaqadar asked them.

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[25]Anwar interview 4, February-March 1992, p. 2. It was a means of communication the Panjsheris would soon adopt.
[26]Ibid., p. 2.
[27]Ibid., p. 4.

"Death to Taraki! Death to Communism!" the men roared.[28] They headed down the valley toward the Kamdesh district headquarters, which they intended to capture. Fearing that the attackers would be cut off, Anwar spent most of the first afternoon arranging the young fighters in rear-guard positions. As a Reuters dispatch in the New York Times later reported, "the guerrillas, sniping from mountain ridges and attacking at night, captured the town of Kamdesh, 40 miles north of Chigha Sarai."[29]

The next morning, from heights above the fighting at the Kamdesh district headquarters, Anwar fired at close range on a few helicopters. The aircraft gained altitude and disengaged from the fight, though not before prematurely dropping ammunition intended for the besieged government force. The rebels recovered the munitions and, within several hours, the remaining government installation at Kamdesh had fallen.[30]

The following day, Anwar and some men of the Piti Valley engaged a government force at a place called Saret Farm. Anwar led the attack, firing with a twenty-shot automatic, although from his account he appears to have aimed low in order to limit casualties.[31] Despite this, two soldiers were wounded and one was killed as the

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[28] Ibid., p. 5.
[29] "Revolt Reported in Afghan Province," New York Times, 8 January 1979.
[30] Anwar interview 4, February-March 1992, p. 8.
[31] Ibid., p. 9.

government forces were swept from the area. That night, the rebels slaughtered a ram in celebration.

A day later, two respected brothers of the Kata clan, Zahir and Tahir, approached Anwar and proposed that he formally become commander of the rebellion. The 'Alaqadar demurred, arguing, "I'm a sick man just out after five months in prison." The brothers were not dissuaded and finally won his agreement. The next day, the new "Commander Anwar" began positioning rebels on the heights overlooking the mouth of the Nicat Valley. It was there that he expected the government retaliation to come.[32]

On two successive occasions, the government attempted to enter the Nicat Valley. During the second push, the rebels outflanked the main body of soldiers, taking fifty-six prisoners and killing about ten more.[33] Two valuable watermills were also destroyed by light artillery.[34] In addition to the large number of prisoners, the rebels captured their first Kalashnikov assault rifles. This emboldened the fighters, although years later Anwar was philosophical about the poor state of their adversaries: "They were Afghan conscripts, right? That's why I wasn't afraid."[35]

By October, with two government posts at Kamdesh and Bargimatal under their control, the rebels decided to push

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[32] Ibid., p. 11.
[33] Ibid.
[34] For the Nuristanis who grind their own grain, this would be a foreshadowing of the troubles they would soon have feeding themselves; however, it was also a stunning victory.
[35] Anwar interview 4, February-March 1992, p. 13.

towards Barikot.[36] Until now, they had fought in their own upland territory, and some men believed the idea of moving into the predominantly Gujar town would inflame the old conflict. "This isn't a Gujar war; it's not a Lowlander war," Anwar told them as they waited several days to attack. "If you weren't aware of the extent [of this anti-Communist campaign], why did you start up this affair?" The dissension compelled Anwar to lead the attack personally. He built a large bunker at the base of a cliff on Shar Ridge overlooking Barikot Road and dispatched unarmed rebels from the village of Badzgal to demolish the road at Mandra Valley Farms.[37] Reinforced by four hundred fifty and ten-shot ammunition clips — a far cry from the muskets and single-shot rifles he had fought with as a young man — Anwar then awaited the government's response.[38]

Soldiers flooded in to repair the road. From his position far above, Anwar began sniping, one by one. To his surprise, he would shoot ten or more soldiers in a day, only to find another repair party approach the following morning. He soon realized that "the government wasn't telling them that there was such a situation."[39] At night, Anwar left the bunker to eat his evening meal

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[36]Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 100.
[37]Anwar interview 4, February-March 1992, p. 15.
[38]Many roads in Nuristan are cantilevered over cliffs, so it is much easier to destroy a road than it is to rebuild one.
[39]Anwar interview 4, February-March 1992, p. 15.

further up the valley, fully expecting to have his position overrun before he returned.

The stalemate continued for two weeks.[40] While the government soldiers fired mortars, they seemed unable to identify the location of Anwar's nest. Each time their crews made progress in repairing the road, the rebels again destroyed it. A few weeks into the siege, a senior captain and a sergeant who had driven up to the front line were captured. When Anwar received these prisoners, whom he knew, he personally dressed their wounds before trussing the enlisted man and sending them both up the valley. Interrogations revealed that these officers believed their attackers were being supported by foreign forces.[41]

Armed with this information, the rebels encircled a large government relief force made up largely of Gujar fighters. After pinning down the column, Anwar learned via a radio intercept that they were running low on water and ammunition. Following unsuccessful government bombing raids — the first of the one-month siege — the rebels moved in, destroying more than ten government vehicles,

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[40]During this time, Anwar recounts that men from the Kata Valley who had not seen the Gujar Wars — shepherds and others — were coming to watch the fighting, bringing Anwar increasing notoriety. Anwar interview 4, February-March 1992, p. 16.

[41]According to Anwar, the Communists believed them to be supported by "Generals from China," Ibid., p. 19.

killing scores, and seizing more than one hundred prisoners.[42]

As the rebels pursued their fight, word spread to the mosques. "God keep the 'Alaqadar alive," the Mullahs said.[43] To Anwar, a lifelong and unabashed atheist, it was a high compliment. It was also a foreshadowing of the political challenges the 'Alaqadar would soon face.

A primary factor contributing to the guerrillas' early success was the high attrition level among the paramilitary gendarmerie. These forces, who Urban points out were traditionally charged with combating "guerrillas and smugglers," had been trained throughout the 1970s by the West Germans. Thus, their loyalties to the new government, in comparison to those of the Soviet-trained army personnel, were rather shaky, and between detention and desertion their numbers throughout 1978 had plummeted.[44] In addition, the rebels benefited from the fact that at this point the Afghan government possessed only about twenty helicopters, most of which were aging Mil-4's.[45] A third factor, of course, was Anwar's earlier mastery of guerrilla tactics and his eagerness, following his imprisonment in Jalalabad, to put them into effect.

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[42]Anwar claims that the number was three to five hundred, Anwar interview 4, February-March 1992, p. 21. The Daily Telegraph reported on 31 October 1978 that one hundred Afghan soldiers had been killed in the fighting in Konar.
[43]Anwar interview 4, February-March 1992, p. 19.
[44]Urban, War in Afghanistan, pp. 14, 18.
[45]Ibid., p. 18.

A major government push more than a month after the hostilities began finally led to the capture of Anwar's bunker one day when he was up the valley.[46] The guerrillas managed to recapture the position briefly, but the Gujars successfully sent a flanking force through the Charat Valley Mountain, overcoming a small Kom group.[47] The PDPA's approach to defeating the rebellion by offering weapons and money to the Gujars and other groups who were hostile to the Nuristanis seemed to work, enabling the entrapped government force, perhaps hundreds strong, to retreat from the valley via Mumdes.[48]

The lifting of the siege exposed the rebels on two fronts. To counter this perilous situation, Anwar divided his forces, sending a group of young Kom fighters with the clansmen into the mountains, while he and men of the Kata clan established a cordon at Ridge Farms. The Kamdesh rebels were now on the defensive.

To make matters worse, three Kata serving on sentry duty under Anwar were soon killed, apparently by disloyal Koms. Anwar believed the men feared a government victory and were trying to hasten the Katas' departure. Thereafter, he dispatched every Kata patrol in Kamdesh with at least one Kom fighter.[49] Rebel forces deployed on the far side of the mountains in Mumdes were also soon

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[46]Anwar interview 5, February-March 1992, p. 1.
[47]Anwar says the force was seven to ten men, including Abdul Muhammad, son of Caaro Merak, who was killed in the engagement, Ibid., p. 2.
[48]Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 100; Anwar interview 5, February-March 1992, p. 3.
[49]Anwar interview 6, February-March 1992, p. 3.

attacked, as a Gujar unit tried three times to force its way into the Kumari Valley. Though they were repelled, an engagement with government forces in the Nicat Valley claimed the lives of Zahir and Tahir, the two brothers who had encouraged Anwar to formally become the rebellion's commander.[50]

Amid these challenges, age-old Kom-Kata rivalries reemerged as Kata leaders insisted on replacing Anwar as commander with one of their own kinsmen, Ubaidullah.[51] This move effectively brought an end to Kamdesh's unified front, as Anwar set up positions around Ustro-T, and the Kata established positions on the far side of the valley and in upriver areas. Heavy mortar from the government positions soon compelled both Kom and Kata forces, low on ammunition, to pull back.

Anwar cites the inspirational role played by the women of the Kamdesh during this final phase of the battle. Often carrying baskets with bread and cheese to forward positions amid government shelling, they encouraged the men to hold their positions.[52]

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[50] Ibid., pp. 4, 6.

[51] Anwar acknowledged that he had "been speaking badly" to the less seasoned Kata fighters; out in front in the initial battles, Anwar had physically threatened the Kata and acknowledged that Ubaidullah had a better way of speaking. Anwar interview 6, February-March 1992, pp. 8-9.

[52] Ibid., pp. 12-13. He also recounts how girls came to throw ashes on boys who shied away from the frontlines, while at the same time "showering with walnuts" — as Strand points out, a "traditional greeting for notables" — those returning from battle. "The women of Nuristan took an uncountably big part in this holy war," Anwar observed of the early battles.

Despite this, by November the main part of the Kamdesh Valley was again in government hands. Restricted to side valleys, Anwar's fighters found themselves cut off from the Kata fighters. From positions in the Bargu Valley, the Kom rebels could see government forces streaming up the central valley. Anwar blamed the highland Kata for the setback, while also being philosophical:

> I don't find fault with them for not fighting like us. They're a free people without a care up in a narrow valley. Downriver we [Kom and Mumo] have to fight the Afghans; we have a fight with the Gahwars; we have a fight with the Gujars; we have to struggle over territory, we have to struggle over land. These people weren't accustomed to battle, and they couldn't take part in the battle like we did.[53]

Staging forces at the mouth of the Bazi Valley, Anwar continued to the Piti Valley where he had heavily armed a number of fighters. To his shock, he found the villages there abandoned. He soon learned that most of the inhabitants were headed for the Pakistani border town of Chitral. Anwar caught up with the party along the Bramni Mountain, though he was unable to convince any of the fighters to turn back. The burning of Bazi and the evacuation of the valley followed shortly thereafter.[54] Edwards describes the strong traditional clan differences in Nuristan, noting that during the summer of 1978, "rivalries were held in check as more and more of the

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[53]Anwar interview 4, February-March 1992, p. 18.
[54]Anwar interview 7, February-March 1992, pp. 1-2.

population of the area threw in their support to those advocating armed insurrection against the government."[55] As autumn set in and the end of the fighting season drew near, those differences reemerged. Anwar realized that he would need to broaden dramatically support for the rebellion if they were to regain the initiative in the spring.

Taking the Rebellion Beyond Kamdesh

From his headquarters at Ustro-T Farms, Anwar sent word to the Kom elders, who, for their part, suggested that were Anwar to write letters (as he had at the beginning of the rebellion) to some sixteen clans and Pashtun tribes, including the Sami, the Salarzai, the Mullah Khel, the Mamund, the frontier Pashtuns, and others, asking them to join the Kom in pursuing the fight, they would support him. It was here that Anwar's experience as an 'Alaqadar, seeking community consensus and providing civil services, made him a particularly dangerous guerrilla.

This was a "battle of right versus wrong," Anwar wrote, blasting the PDPA as "infidels." He recognized that to continue the war he needed to clearly state his case. Before long, the elders took Anwar's letters to the khan of Khar, the khan of Nawagai, and even the son of the Nawab of Dir on the Pakistani side of the border, and

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[55]Edwards, Before Taliban, p. 134.

others, encouraging them to join the fight.[56] Soon thereafter, Pakistani intelligence officers arrived in eastern Nuristan looking for "a man named Anwar."

Hearing of their inquiries, the now somewhat desperate Anwar met the agents in the vicinity of Ustro-T Farms. After introducing themselves as ISI oficials, the men announced that they were there to invite him to visit Pakistan.

General Akhtar

Several days later, upon reaching the town of Drosh on the Pakistani border, Anwar was appalled at the sight of Nuristani refugees. Some were so poor and miserable "they were ready to sell their children."[57] After visiting with his wife and children, whom he had sent to Drosh a month earlier, Anwar was escorted by the Pakistani officers to a meeting with General Abdur Rahman Akhtar, the director of the country's Inter-Service Intelligence, who had flown up from Islamabad specifically to meet him. Anwar later recalled the conversation:

"Anwar, this thing of yours, this revolution," the general asked, "what does it mean?"

Though an atheist, Anwar increasingly portrayed the fight in religious terms. He realized religion was a hard

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[56]Anwar interview 6, February-March 1992, p. 14.
[57]Anwar interview 7, February-March 1992, p. 25.

argument to reject. "God has commanded us to fight," he told the Westernized Akhtar.

"How has he commanded you?" Akhtar challenged him. "He hasn't commanded twenty million people in Afghanistan, but he has commanded you?"

"We were the last people to become Muslims," Anwar continued. "And we're the people on the frontier. If we don't do this battle, other people won't. I started this business so that we could teach the people."

A steely-eyed survivor of wars and coups, General Akhtar, perhaps sensing the intelligence and confidence of the man facing him, next asked, "If it is defeated, what will you do?"

"If all the people die, the country will be divided up and handed over to [our enemies]," Anwar concluded. "God says it will be theirs."

Becoming slightly emotional, Akhtar contradicted him. "No, it won't happen," the usually dour general replied, placing his hand on Anwar's shoulder. The conversation continued, the two men joking about creating a "Radio Nuristan" in Pakistan to incite the Afghans, just as Daoud's Radio Afghanistan attempted to incite Pakistani Pashtuns. After what Anwar believed was a sincere exchange, the two men parted company.[58]

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[58]Anwar interview 6, February-March 1992, pp. 17, 19-21.

The next day, the Deputy Commissioner of the northwestern Pakistani city of Chitral arranged a flight for Anwar to Peshawar, where he was taken to the house of the governor of the North-West Frontier Province, Fazil Haq. Haq picked up on Akhtar's line of questioning: "What's this battle all about, why did you start [it]?" He then asked if any aid he had sent had reached the Nuristani front. When told it had not, Haq became visibly angry; Anwar recalled him "rubbing his hands together in agitation." He then gave Anwar three thousand rupees and sent him to the commander of the Bala Hissar Fort, General Zulfikar. "From now on, if you're not able to see me, see Zulfikar," Fazil Haq told him.[59]

General Zulfikar received Anwar and asked him to write a list of whatever materials he needed. "I wrote down a ton of stuff," Anwar remembered. However, when he returned the next day, Zulfikar apologized; Islamabad was rescinding its offer. The general hoped the situation would shift, but at present he had been instructed not to provide any military aid. Anwar quickly suspected that Hezb-i-Islami, which had already recruited a Nuristani named Sabour to oversee the refugees in Chitral, was behind Islamabad's reversal.[60]

Several days later, Anwar was invited to Islamabad. Having never been in the neighbouring capital before, he

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[59]Anwar interview 7, February-March 1992, pp. 4-6.
[60]Ibid., pp. 2, 7.

invited Kush Ahmad, a prince of Chitral, to accompany him. Soon after arriving in the capital, the men had a brief meeting with General Akhtar, who directed them to Director General Aziz Yousef, head of the ISI's Afghan Department. Anwar told Yousef the full story of the rebellion and his life before it. Yousef took detailed notes, mentioning that he would personally be briefing President Zia ul-Haq on the Kamdesh Front. As they were leaving, Yousef placed an envelope with two thousand rupees into Anwar's hand. Embarrassed by the largess, Anwar mentioned that he had plenty of money, but Kush Ahmad encouraged him to take it.[61] The two men split the money and checked into the Faisal Hotel on Liaqat Road.

During the next few days, Anwar and Kush Ahmad visited a number of embassies in Islamabad, including those of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Iran. Anwar also gave a number of press interviews. Shortly thereafter, once back at Drosh, he was introduced to a tall, lean, young Afghan militant who wanted to know all about the Kamdesh Front. He introduced himself as Massoud.

The young rebel arrived with a man named Jalal and a French reporter named Raymond Depardon. Anwar encouraged them to go to Kamdesh and to bring out photographs of the war. Fighting was still occurring around Bazi and Anwar thought it might help the cause. Undoubtedly he was also

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[61] Ibid., p. 9.

impressed with the young rebel's keen intellect and energy. At about this time, it was reported in Pakistan that Gul Mohommad, a leading pro-PDPA Gujar figure, had been killed in Nuristan, and Anwar hoped the dynamics were shifting.

Both Hezb and Jamiat news sources seized Gul Mohommad's death to claim credit for their group for the advances in the region. Irritated at the descriptions of his fighters and allies as "volunteers" of one or other of the Pakistani-based opposition organizations, Anwar resolved to call on the leaders of the two groups. After a fruitful meeting with Burhannudin Rabbani, the leader of Jamiat, whom he found a thoughtful, soft-spoken individual, Anwar called upon Gulbuddin. After introductions, Anwar extracted from his pocket the offending newspaper article.

"Don't write this stuff!" he said. "There aren't any volunteers of the Hesbi army. The men are God's volunteers. They are fighting under God's commands."

"Whoever doesn't fight under [Hezb-i-Islami], his Jihad doesn't count," Gulbuddin replied, referring to the rights of martyrs in a sanctioned holy war.

"There are a lot of powerful scholars there, as with you, and the scholars agree and gave out an edict that a Jihad does exist," Anwar countered. "Those mullahs there weren't saying whoever doesn't make [tribute] to

Gulbuddin, whoever doesn't fight under his flag, *his* Jihad doesn't count. I'm hearing this for the first time from you." The two men grew agitated and Anwar and his party abruptly rose and left.

The Hesb Party members "are not upright people," the nationalist Anwar concluded. Gulbuddin "is a bad person. I like Rabbani; I dislike him."[62]

This was a question of shared values and objectives: Hezb was a radical and ethnocentric Pashtun party, Jamiat a traditionalist and more nationally focused one. To Anwar, himself from a minority ethnic group, he found the latter far more inclusive. In addition to hoping to displace the Communists, Anwar believed that a "sanctioned Jihad" would protect the Kom from their traditional enemy, the Gujar.[63] Though the Jihad in Nuristan had been initiated by the atheist Anwar, it was exactly the model of an effective popular insurgency that the exiled theologians Mujadidi and Rabbani were looking for.[64] These individuals were happy to sanction a partially ethnic-tribal uprising in the hope that it would help trigger a general revolt that would lead to the fall of the Communist government in Kabul.

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[62] Ibid., p. 15.

[63] Roy discusses the tendency of "communities [to react] towards the new government on the basis of their ethnic and tribal loyalties," Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 99.

[64] The Mujadidi family had played a significant role in domestic events including the second Anglo-Afghan war and Habibullah Kaliquani's 1929 takeover. See Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, pp. 57-67, and Edwards, Heroes of the Age, p. 22. Sibghatullah Mujadidi had been exiled to Denmark in 1959 for plotting to kill Krushchev, Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 43.

At a gathering that Anwar was invited to attend in the Pakistani town of Takal, the prominent cleric Sibghatullah Mujadidi - a descendent of the Pir Mujadidi, who had aided Habibullah Kalakani's entry to Kabul in late 1928 - openly declared that "This Jihad in Afghanistan was started by the Nuristani people." He continued: "This is a Jihad. With the approval of a spiritual person, a religious scholar, I give you this edict: that every person who is a Muslim should make Jihad against the Communists."[65] Rabbani and other clerics rose to support the fatwa, and then Anwar, to his surprise, was asked to address the large group.

"Brothers, I wasn't aware of what was happening here," he began.

> Now I see this gathering and I am both very happy and very upset. I am very happy for the reason that the people of Afghanistan, who are Muslims, have come to think about this Jihad. That now you have gotten together and are thinking about this thing, that the Jihad exists. Professor Mujadidi ordered it, Professor Rabbani ordered it, and one of our great [Nuristani] scholars ordered it too. But here I see so many *istimo* people, and there are so many Muslims dying in a single creek, and here I see your food going down, and I am very upset. About Muslims, they've said if one Muslim is on the western horizon and one is on the eastern horizon, each one will be upset with the other. You all are very happy, putting on this great big thing with your turbans on. There are people dying of hunger; the people dying of cold. There while the people were [fleeing], some three, four, five score children gave up their souls, wrapped in the women's scarves.[66]

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[65]Anwar interview 7, February-March 1992, p. 17.
[66]Ibid., pp. 18-19.

Although it is not clear whether Massoud was at the assembly or exactly when he resolved to go and fight the next spring in Nuristan, Anwar's growing prestige was certainly a significant factor in his decision to do so. Little did either man know that the situation they would return to in Nuristan later that winter differed greatly from that which had existed the previous fall.

The Uprising Spreads to the West

An important impetus to the uprising was provided by the return to Kunar of Samiullah Safi Wakil, the son of a prominent tribal notable who had led the Safi uprising (1945-46) against the central government, and had spent twenty-one years in various prisons surviving a death sentence and numerous beatings, one of which had been witnessed by his son Wakil. The younger Safi's reaction to his father's mistreatment was to run for a seat in the newly created Parliament. In many regards the decision mirrored the one made by Anwar to seek a career in law enforcement following his experience with the Gujar usurpations. Waikil's decision to enter government occurred six years after the USSR's entry into Afghanistan, as East-West ideologies and questions of national sovereignty came to eclipse those of tribe and

state. Within a short time after his election, Wakil became an advisor to the Shah.[67]

Having returned to his home province of Kunar in January 1979, Wakil invited the Nuristani leader, Abdul Jabar of Ningalam, to his house, where they decided to attack the district headquarters at Chapa Dara. Reluctant to allow the government to pit the Safis against the Nuristanis, Wakil insisted that once the district administrator (a member of Wadir-Safi lineage) was captured, he would be kept in the Safi territory and not removed to Nuristan.[68]

To further reduce the risk of inter-Safi discord, Wakil arranged for members of the Wadir-Safi clan to lead the first attacks. The success of this operation gave the rebellion that Anwar and the Kom had started in September fresh strength and led to the creation of a joint Safi-Nuristani jirga, or political body. This, in turn, incited other Afghans to rise in revolt. A New York Times story on February 5, 1979, about rebel activity cited Afghan resistance leaders in Peshawar who said that until that time, "clashes between troops and armed villagers in different parts of the country have been largely unrelated. The dissidents said, however, that the nucleus

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[67]Edwards, Before Taliban, pp. 120-121.

[68]Although the Safis had been concentrated in western Kunar, General Mohammad Daoud Khan's suppression of the Safi revolt in 1947-1949 "resulted in the last large-scale forced migration in modern Afghan history. Many leaders of the Safi revolt were scattered in extended family units across north Afghanistan," Dupree, Afghanistan, p. 537.

of a coordinated move against the government has taken shape in Nouristan."[69]

Ubaidullah Surrenders

At about the same time as Wakil returned to Kunar, Anwar was informed about the defection of the Kata commander, Ubaidullah, to the government side. Anwar immediately set out for Afghanistan, arriving several days later in Mandragal, where he summarily organized his men for an ambush of government forces in that valley.

The following day, as government vehicles passed the rebels, Anwar was shocked and dismayed to spot several of his Kom clansmen seated among the Communist troops. For an hour, the rebels waited in their positions. Eventually, they heard the convoy rolling back down the valley. Anwar, who told his men not to fire until he did, aimed carefully to shoot out the tires of the lead vehicle. Instantly, the other rebels opened fire. Anwar estimated the dead and captured to be fifteen to seventeen.[70] He released all but one of the prisoners, his goal up to that point having been to limit the deaths of ordinary soldiers. Years later Anwar would acknowledge his naiveté in releasing detainees amid an ongoing operation. The men soon disclosed his position. The one

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[69]Robert Trumbull, "Foes of Afghan Rulers Are Hoping Skirmishes Will Bring on Rebellion," New York Times, 5 February 1979.

[70]Of those, he estimated six or seven had been killed, including two officers and one doctor, Anwar interview 8, February-March 1992, pp. 3-4.

prisoner he detained was his kinsman, Mullah Hazrat Ali, who had assisted the government. The cleric, who had received some wounds in the initial engagement, showered Anwar with invectives. Furious at Hazrat Ali's treachery and irreverence, Anwar shot the cleric in "an extremity."[71] It was in part a warning to other would-be collaborators.

Within a day of the attack, a delegation of Kata and other elders who had reached an accord with the government called on Anwar in his bunker. Brandishing a Koran, the men explained the hardships and hunger their clans were enduring and argued that breaking the truce would be an anti-Islamic act. "You bastards," Anwar replied. "Which prophet has been sent up to tell you to make peace?"[72] It was a line of argument with which the persuasive non-believer was becoming increasingly comfortable. After converting the elders to the logic of his position, Anwar agreed to leave his bunker and address a larger gathering in Ustro-T.

"If you start a holy war and then you stop it, you become infidels," he told the gathering. Unable to disagree with this admonishment, the men asked how they should proceed, with the government force entrapped in the middle of the valley. Anwar offered to write a letter saying:

> Hey, o leader of my enemy. Whatever kind of revolution this is that has started in Nuristan, it's a revolution

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[71] Ibid., p. 4.
[72] Ibid.

about right and wrong. It didn't just start up stupidly [through inexperience]. This thing was started up knowingly, with brain power. You have gone to the Kom Territory. You thought you went up there by force. You didn't go up there by force. We allowed you up there. For this short time that I have let you into the middle [of the valley] I'll do this. I've let you up the valley; now I've got you besieged from my side, boxed in. You can't move a distance of five fingers up or down the valley. You're not able to go across the valley in either direction. Until [you agree to my terms] you can't go anywhere. If you turn over all your arms, your guns, bullets, and gunpowder to the holy warriors, I will [grant you safe conduct]. Otherwise, not you or one of your men is going to escape alive from me.

Anwar signed and dated the letter, written in Persian, and handed it to an elder to deliver to the government commander. To his dismay, he soon learned that the elders, after receiving money, had agreed to let the government forces remain in the LanDai Valley on the far side of the Kumari Valley, and to keep the rebels on the other side.[73]

Frightened by Anwar's rage over that arrangement, the Mer Clan agreed to deliver a second ultimatum from Anwar and in the meantime hold the middle valley. Instead, it appears that they warned the government to flee and simultaneously lifted the cordon. Receiving word of this development, Anwar attacked the fleeing troops. He recalled a scene of soldiers escaping down a path strewn with corpses as either compassion or lack of ammunition led him to allow some men to pass.[74]

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[73] Ibid., pp. 5-6.
[74] Ibid., p. 7.

Having scored this victory, Anwar went with thirty troops to Kun, where he contacted Wakil and, sometime in late January or early February, had his first wartime meeting with him. Shortly after the meeting, on March 10, the first joint Nuristani-Safi force attacked the government at Bar Kandi. Both leaders agreed strongly on the need to minimize casualties, and the fighters "followed their victory by not allowing anyone from the village [of Bar Kandi] to be punished and offering their opponents full pardon if they agreed to join against the government." The operation's success led to another joint attack on the government post at Srah Morgah near Utapur near the foot of the Pech Valley. The fighting, which lasted several days, was reportedly "the decisive battle of the uprising to that point."[75]

Following the capture of the post, the rebels occupied the town of Utapur, scattering a convoy of Communist sympathizers and military officers. One fleeing convoy was attacked in the vicinity of Pirunai Dag, where the rebels took a number of prisoners, much as they had at Mandragal some months earlier. Additional rebel operations soon cleared the remaining government forces from Ningalam, at which point the entire Pech Valley was free of PDPA control.[76]

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[75]Edwards says that the battle occurred "later in March," Before Taliban, p. 142.
[76]Ibid., p. 142.

Massoud, whom Anwar had met the previous fall in Pakistan, arrived in Kamdesh during this campaign and participated in the fighting. This was a formative period in his tactical and political training, and both Anwar and Wakil befriended the bright young militant.

The focus of the war was about to shift to the western Afghan city of Herat. However, for the first several weeks of March 1979, after the victories at Bar Kandi, Utapur, and Nigalam, Massoud found himself at the epicentre of the emerging opposition movement. Riding to and from rapidly-shifting front lines on a white horse, one of the few in the area, Massoud attracted significant attention both as an eager student of guerrilla tactics and as Rabbani's envoy to the eastern rebel front.[77] This was to be "the high point of the uprising in Pech – militarily, organizationally, and culturally."[78] Gulbuddin's radicals would soon arrive in Kunar and hijack the prominent uprising from nationalist leaders like Anwar and Wakil and their Jamiat allies. They would be replaced with Haji Abdul Gaffar and Mullah Afzal Kati, extremist leaders who were not as interested in freeing their nation of Communists as they were in radicalizing it.

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[77]Though Massoud admitted that at that point in his career "I had not seen any [fighting]," at the same time he "encouraged Mawlawi Abdullah to set a base at the [rear] and threaten the supply routes of the enemy," Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 11 September 1994, p. 10.

[78]Edwards, Before Taliban, p. 143.

A Second Front

In February 1979, according to Olivier Roy, "several dozen militants of the Jamiat returned secretly [to Herat] from Iran. They had formed a rough plan for a revolt, though a date was not fixed, and were in contact with the captains of the division stationed at Herat."[79] Another supporter of the rebellion monitored Communist guests at the Herat Hotel and dispatched men to Pakistan to secure arms before the fighting began.[80] To what extent this man or Ismail Khan and 'Alauddin Khan – two captains of the Herat Division who became the two most significant commanders of the western front – communicated with the Jamiat leadership in Peshawar in the days preceding the rebellion is not known.[81] Certainly the Persian-speaking Rabbani enjoyed general support among the Persian population of Herat. For his strategy of "counter-coup supported by popular uprising" to work, Rabbani recognized that the rebels needed to broaden their movement beyond the Nuristani-Safi Front in Kunar, which at that point remained the major focus of the two main Pakistani-based resistance organizations.[82] Independent risings in

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[79]The captains, Roy writes, included Ismail Khan and 'Alauddin Khan, who were secret members of Jamiat, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 108.

[80]Radek Sikorski, Dust of the Saints: A Journey to Herat in Time of War (New York: Paragon House Publishers, 1990), p. 206. Nur Ahmad, an opposition activist, claims to have raised nine hundred thousand Afghani among the military which he gave to Mohammad Ali for these arms purchases.

[81]Said Nurullah Emad, from Herat province, was a prominent Jamiati in Peshawar at this time.

[82]Rabbani had dispatched Massoud, or Massoud had elected to go, to Kunar, following Anwar's fall visit to Pakistan, in part to attempt

Hazarajat and Badakhshan were too far from Pakistan for either Jamiat or Hesbi to play a direct role in early 1979.[83] Thus, beyond actual Jamiat "membership" in Herat Province prior to the rebellion, which Roy asserts existed,[84] it is likely that Rabbani would have attempted to disseminate his knowledge of the previous fall's Kamdesh fighting, as well as the rebellion in Badakhshan, to encourage opening a second front in Herat.[85] If so, Rabbani's efforts succeeded in sparking a rebellion that would, for the first time, bring the growing Soviet "crisis" in Afghanistan to the top of the Politburo's agenda.

Urban claims that "what turned the situation from a minor local disturbance into a national crisis was the use of soldiers from the army's 17th Division to break up a riot" which had started in Herat on March 15, 1979, in reaction to the new government's radical literacy campaign.[86] The New York Times, on March 22, stated that according to rebel spokesman Sabatullah Mujadidi, "reports from Herat indicated that an army regiment had mutinied

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to ally the front with the political apparatus Jamiat had created in Pakistan, thereby giving themselves added credibility.

[83]Rabbani, a native of Faizabad, the provincial capital of Badakhshan, may have had direct links with the rebellion there.

[84]Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 108.

[85]Although the Settem-i-Melli, a Maoist group, was active in Badakhshan in the fall of 1978, there is no evidence that Rabbani or Jamiat were in any way linked to these activities, Urban, War in Afghanistan, p. 27.

[86]Urban, War in Afghanistan, p. 30. Ala'Uddin Khan later claimed that there were only fifteen Communists in the entire division and thus discontent with the action was high, interview with Mark Urban, 7 April 1986.

when it was ordered to fire on rebels."[87] Certainly problems in the ethnically Persian city had started well before March. For one eventual leader of the rebellion, the decisive factor was being compelled to bind the hands of anti-Communist detainees "behind their back, cover their eyes with plaster of Paris and push them into ditches" where bulldozers then buried them alive.[88] Like Mohammad Anwar the previous summer, who had pledged to start a rebellion in Kamdesh if he survived detention, this individual was specifically reacting to the PDPA's murderous practices in Herat. The fact that many PDPA atrocities were committed, or perceived to be committed, by eastern Ghilzai Pashtuns against Persian Heratis, as Giorgio Vercellin suggests, also likely exacerbated the sense of outrage.[89] An article in the journal Ettefaq-e-Islami zealously promoting the theory of evolution – "that man comes from monkey" – may have also triggered the

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[87] "Afghan Rebels Said to Cut Links With Town of Herat," New York Times, 22 March 1979.

[88] Sikorski, Dust of the Saints: A Journey to Herat in Time of War, pp. 205-206. Nur Ahmad claims to have participated in eight or nine mass executions over half a year in which hundreds of people were killed. On one round-up in the village of Mullah Sian, Mohammad Omar Khan, Agah Salam Jan, and "fifteen to sixteen others" were arrested and then buried alive..

[89] Giorgio Vercellin, Afghanistan 1973-1978: dalla republica presidenziale alla republica democratica (Venice: Universita degli Studi di Venezia, 1979), pp. 63-64, from Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 108. If such were the case, certainly it would be consistent with the underlying Kom-Gujar conflict that fueled the Kamdesh rebellion. Though Roy disputes this claim, earlier in his book he acknowledges that "a certain number of communities reacted to the new government on the basis of their ethnic and tribal loyalties: the Ghilzai were in favour of change because it meant that it was now their turn to be in power," Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 99. The existence of a similar phenomenon in Herat seems quite possible.

ensuing uprising.[90] Roy suggests that the rebellion was "unplanned, but the link to Jamiat militants and the mawlawi who preached in the mosques the evening before has been established."[91] In other words, while Rabbani's communication with Herati clerics may have been significant, the execution of what became known as the Hoot 24 Rebellion was a spontaneous event.[92]

Hoot 24 Rebellion

Before dawn on March 14, 1979, three soldiers on guard duty at the Herat Hotel, where a number of Soviet advisors were staying, changed from their military uniforms into civilian clothes. The New York Times quoted Mujadidi as saying that "Government soldiers had stood aside while rebels killed civilian supporters of Prime Minster Taraki." Having played minor roles in planning the rebellion, a number of the soldiers were acutely aware they could "be mistaken for Communists" that day, as one later recalled.[93]

About 07.00 hours, a young man, "one of a new class of Afghan professionals educated in the sciences at Kabul University, but attached to traditional customs," joined a crowd approaching the police post near the Sepolak Gates

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[90]Sikorski, Dust of the Saints: A Journey to Herat in Time of War, p. 225.
[91]Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 108.
[92]March 15.
[93]David Binder, "U.S. Aides Call Afghan Rebellion Challenge to Pro-Soviet Leadership," New York Times, 23 March 1979. Sikorski, Dust of the Saints: A Journey to Herat in Time of War, p. 207.

to Herat.[94] He had been a mechanical engineer responsible for overseeing the maintenance of heavy equipment used in the construction of the Herat-Maimana Road.[95]

For several minutes, the soldiers assigned to the Sepolak Gates post fired over the engineer and others in the crowd as they approached their positions. Then, as the standoff continued, an armoured personal carrier opened fire and the mob surged forward. The vehicle was quickly encircled, and the engineer and others detached the heavy gun from the vehicle as soldiers began to surrender their rifles. A number of officers also sought quarter, but, having threatened the soldiers minutes earlier, were promptly executed. The crowd then moved to the Kandahar Gate, which was blocked by two tanks. Obscuring one of the tank's visors with mud, the crowd poured gasoline into the vehicle and then immolated the crew, as the second tank escaped through the southeastern entrance to the city.[96]

Around this time, a former shopkeeper who had sold second-hand clothes climbed over a wall behind a police station near the Malik Gate of the Old City where pro-PDPA forces were firing on the crowd.[97] The merchant, whose

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[94]Sikorski, Dust of the Saints: A Journey to Herat in Time of War, p. 226.

[95]It is noteworthy that eight years after the uprising, the young man, Mohammad Khalid, described himself as a member of the "Muslim Brotherhood," not the Jamiat, Sikorski, Dust of the Saints: A Journey to Herat in Time of War, p. 225.

[96]Ibid., p. 226.

[97]As the man described it, "When the communists took power, the business stopped because the clothes could not come from Pakistan any more. As the prices went up, fewer people could afford them.

business had failed after the revolution, stealthily approached from the rear, firing on two of the soldiers with his English flintlock rifle before fleeing.[98] His friend claimed to have shot five soldiers in the same attack.

The Herat Hotel

At 08.00 hours, as a crowd approached his post, the man who had earlier been forced to participate in the Communists' mass executions-by-suffocation entered the Herat hotel. He approached three unsuspecting Soviets in plain clothes and clumsily opened fire with his Kalashnikov.[99] They fled, returning fire with handguns and wounding the young Afghan. In the ensuing firefight, two of the Soviets were killed. Others fled to the hotel's roof, from where they fired down at the growing mob on the street until they exhausted their ammunition. At that point, the crowd swarmed the building and upon reaching the roof, threw the foreigners off to their deaths. Eventually, the number of rioters swelled to the point that the building's top floor collapsed, crushing many to death as it fell. March 15, 1979, in Herat was becoming a bloodbath.

I became poor because I earned less, but food was more [expensive]," Sikorski, Dust of the Saints: A Journey to Herat in Time of War, p. 213.

[98]A "Haji" is the title given to one who has performed the "haj" or pilgrimage to Mecca.

[99]AK-47 assault rifle, adopted by the Soviet Army in 1949.

By 15.00 hours, the mobs were "killing everyone who was not dressed in the traditional Muslim clothes."[100] One postal clerk only narrowly escaped the crowd's vengeance when a man in a traditional long black coat called out that he was a "good Muslim."[101] A heavy-set Russian mechanic was less lucky: he was shot and decapitated. The heavy equipment engineer who had helped disable the armoured vehicles at the Sepolak and Kandahar Gates, although a respected member of the Muslim Brotherhood, was unable to save two of his clean-cut young employees from Kabul. Seized by a mob, their pleas in the dialect of the capital city only hastened their demise.[102] As the sun went down, pro-Communist elements from the 17th Division cautiously reentered the city, securing strategic and politically valuable sites.

That night, after recapturing the Grand Mosque, the PDPA announced over loudspeakers that "the uprising was the work of agents of China and America and that we, the noble people of Herat, should not listen to them."[103] The following day, the government's 17th Division artillery opened fire on civilian sections of the city as Il-28 bombers[104] from the 335 Air Regiment in Shindand bombed

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[100]Abdul Satar Ahmadi, quoted in Sikorski, Dust of the Saints: A Journey to Herat in Time of War, p. 203.
[101]Ibid., pp. 203-204. The man's name was Abdul Razik; he escaped after being stripped of his Western clothing.
[102]Mohammad Khalid recorded their names as Asadullah and Inyatullah. Ibid., p. 227.
[103]Ibid., p. 228.
[104]Il-28 Beagle (Ilyushin) was the first jet bomber to enter service with the Soviet air force in 1950. It is a three-crew aircraft with two Klimov VK-1A power engine and has a range 1135 to 2400 km

wide areas of the city.[105] Confined to headquarters while only trusted Communists were allowed to respond to the attacks, Captain Ismail Khan and Lieutenant 'Alauddin Khan waited.[106]

Rebellion of the 17th Division

Senior officers within the 17th Division served as the liaison between religious leaders in the city and key field officers such as Ismail Khan and 'Alauddin Khan. On Wednesday, March 13, city elders had also visited Ismail Khan and warned him of the rebellion the next day.[107] A MiG fighter making suspiciously low passes over the city that day appeared to confirm this warning.

Biding their time on their base for the first day and a half of the fighting, Ismail Khan, 'Alauddin Khan, and one Lieutenant Abdullah decided to plan their attack for Friday, March 15, at 13.00 hours.[108] The men were incensed by the indiscriminate shelling that had followed the initial day of violence and used this event to solidify their support in the ranks. Khan's forces attacked sixty Soviets and Communists in the mess hall from two

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with maximum speed 560 mph. http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/ russia/il-28.htm

[105] The Guardian, 31 March 1979, quoted in Urban, War in Afghanistan, p. 30.

[106] Khan had been accused of being a rebellion sympathizer, Sikorski, Dust of the Saints: A Journey to Herat in Time of War, p. 230.

[107] Ibid., p. 230.

[108] It is unclear whether the attack took place on Friday, March 15, as Roy states, or on Sunday, March 17, as Sikorski records it. The Islamic "Sabith" having been March 15, it appears that Sikorski's transcript may have mistaken that day for the Western Sabbath on Sunday, Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 108.

directions, but inadvertently left one entrance uncovered, allowing some men to escape. Failing to enlist the support of a nearby artillery battery, which had fired on the PDPA supporters with small arms, five of the Soviets then attempted to flee in a jeep. Their escape was halted by other pro-rebellion soldiers, who shot out the vehicle's tires. The men were brought before Captain Khan, who identified them as participants in the shelling. All were promptly executed, and by 15.00 hours, the base was under the control of the rebels.[109]

Later that afternoon, bombers descended on the 17th Division Headquarters. Khan suspected that the planes were operating out of the USSR.[110] Opening fire with 37mm anti-aircraft guns, the rebel soldiers were powerless to stop the jets, although they shot down two helicopters that day.[111] That night, Khan's men overcame the crews of several tanks, which returned from the city to attempt to retake the base. Over the next two days, other PDPA forces held their position at the Pashtunistan bridge, as most of the soldiers Khan had recruited from the 17th Division melted away, returning to their homes.

On Wednesday, March 20, a convoy of tanks, with "a green banner on each turret, and [crews] dressed in Muslim civilian clothes" entered the city. Khan and other

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[109] Ibid., p. 231.
[110] Kakar identifies the bombers as having been "based at Doshanbe in Russian Tajikistan," Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979-1982, p. 34.
[111] Sikorski, Dust of the Saints: A Journey to Herat in Time of War, p. 232.

Heratis were momentarily duped by the Islamic symbols and slogans echoing from the convoy over loudspeakers; they thought the men were defectors from Kandahar. Only after the convoy had been allowed to pass though the southeast gate of the city did they realize it was composed of PDPA troops commanded by Major General Sayyed Mukarram.[112] Mukarram's forces, with air support, quickly regained Communist control over the city. As Urban writes, "events of Herat shook the government."[113] Once control was reestablished, the PDPA seemed determined to make an example of the city.

Similar anxiety was occurring in Moscow, where the Politburo was soon meeting to discuss military aid requests from Comrade Taraki. Soviet deaths in the rebellion were likely around fifty, while the Guardian, in an article on March 31, 1979, estimated that five thousand individuals on both sides had been killed in the attack.[114] As Ismail Khan headed into the mountains with the last sixty members of the 17th Division, he recalled that "gunfire in the city was continuing and I could hear distant screams."[115] The city was enveloped in thick clouds of dust from explosions and fires.

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[112]Urban, War in Afghanistan, p. 30; Henry S. Bradsher, Afghanistan and the Soviet Union (North Carolina: Duke Press Policy Studies, 1983), pp. 100-101.
[113]Urban, War in Afghanistan, p. 30.
[114]Quoted in Ibid., p. 30.
[115]Eight years later, six of those men were still active members of his militia. Sikorski, Dust of the Saints: A Journey to Herat in Time of War, p. 233.

Rabbani now had an incipient, if only nominally-aligned, force in the west. Once word of the Herat fighting spread over Persian radio services, neither he nor Massoud could have failed to recognize that the Herat uprising had overnight eclipsed the eastern front where the war had begun. For the Nuristanis and their new allies, the Safi, pride dictated that they attempt to support the rising wave of rebellion.

The Kerala Massacre

For the Kunar Front, after the seizure of Chapa Dara, Utapur, and Ningalam, the next obvious target was the provincial capital of Chagha Serai. As Edwards notes, the string of victories over the previous two months provided the front for the first time with "the weapons and ammunition to mount such a campaign."[116] Although the Nuristani front was becoming irreparably fractured, with Massoud serving as "mediator between Anwar and Mawlawi Abdullah,"[117] a plan was hatched for the assault on Chagha Serai.

On the night of April 18, 1979, a force of fifty-two rebels approached Kunar's provincial capital through the village of Kerala. Whether or not this group knew that a second rebel team that was supposed to launch a simultaneous assault had failed to enter the town from

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[116]Edwards, Before Taliban, p. 145.
[117]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 11 June 1994, p. 10.

another approach is unclear. In the melee that followed, the fighters in Kerala became enveloped by a government-mechanized column. The rebels resisted until mid-day on April 19 when, despite assistance from the inhabitants of the village, they ran out of ammunition. In the most costly rebel engagement of the war in Kunar to date, only three members of the original assault party managed to escape.[118]

The next day, April 20, the PDPA forces returned to Kerala, allegedly with Soviet advisors. After separating the women and children and herding them into a mosque, the Communists "gathered all the adult men and teenage boys in a field, where they were to participate in a 'jirga.'"[119] Instead, however, after correctly charging that some of them had collaborated with the rebels, the Communists executed hundreds of men of the town of Kerala, as the women looked on.[120] As Edwards writes:

> This event forever changed the terms of the engagement. The government, under the supervision of its Soviet advisors, decided that the only way to deal with an uprising of the sort they faced in Kunar was to terrorize the civilian population [much as they had in Herat the previous month] into withholding support from the insurgency. For their part the rebels were shocked by what happened at Kerala, especially the fact that the government had targeted non-combatants. According to tribal custom, fighting should be carried out between armed men

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[118] Edwards, Before Taliban, p. 145.
[119] Ibid., p. 145.
[120] According to Urban, "On 20 April 1979, the village of Kerala in the Kunar valley was razed, and over 1,000 of its inhabitants killed," War in Afghanistan, p. 33. Also see Edward R. Girardet, Afghanistan: The Soviet War (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), pp. 107-110. Edwards says "an estimated seventeen hundred boys and men were massacred," Before Taliban, p. 145.

> willing to court the risks of combat, while civilians are kept out of the line of fire. To target unarmed men was antithetical to the code of conduct expected of men who value [traditional Afghan] honor.[121]

Shocked by these atrocities, Wakil travelled to Bajuar on the Pakistani side of the border and lobbied the Mahmund and Salarzai tribes to attack Chagha Serai from the east. With Safi forces positioned to the west and Anwar's forces to the north, Wakil attempted to persuade the Nawab of Khar – whom Edwards describes as "the paramount political figure in the area" – that a three-pronged attack was necessary to dislodge the Communist forces from the province.[122] The Nawab, though sympathetic, offered only four artillery pieces.[123] For two months, Waikil's jirga, remaining at Bajuar, watched as the nationalist Kunar front, which had existed for less than six months, steadily declined and Gulbuddin's radical forces began penetrating the area.

The political divisions among the various Kunar fronts, though instructive, appeared too great to overcome. At some point, perhaps immediately after the Kerala massacre, Massoud decided to return to Pakistan and

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[121] Edwards, Before Taliban, pp. 145-146.

[122] Ibid., p. 147. Also see Richard F. Strand, "The Evolution of Anti-Communist Resistance in Eastern Nuristan," in M. Nazif Shahrani and Robert L. Canfield (eds.), Revolution and Rebellions in Afghanistan: Anthropological Perspectives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), cited in Edwards, Before Taliban, p. 146, note 8.

[123] Perhaps encouraged by Anwar's trip to Pakistan the previous fall, and assuming that his Pashtun credentials might enable him to win over the tribal leader, Wakil recalled replying with disdain, "If you need artillery pieces, I'll give you the ones we have taken from the Russians." Bajuar was within "the political jurisdiction of Pakistan," Edwards recounts, adding, "in retrospect, Wakil appears to have been naïve in expecting to receive assistance from beyond the border," Before Taliban, pp. 146-147.

begin planning his long-expected return to the Panjsher Valley.[124] In addition to his frustration with the Kunar groups, he was undoubtedly also influenced by the great success of the Herat uprising and his natural propensity not to get caught behind events.

Massoud had achieved much of what he had set out to accomplish in Nuristan, having witnessed both the political and military realities of a guerrilla war. In addition to registering members for Jamiat (a task he later recalled as being of dubious value), Massoud was able to combine his years of study, and prior brief exposure to combat in the 1975 rebellion, with a practical framework from which to advance his political-military aspirations. He had also surveyed a route by which a supply road might be extended from Nuristan to the Panjsher.[125]

Of the broad cross-section of people he encountered in his role as Rabbani's envoy, undoubtedly he learned the most from 'Alaqadar Mohammad Anwar Amin, under whose command he loosely served during much of his time in Kunar. The veteran of the Gujar Wars identified with the young Panjsheri, whose intellect and energy were similar to his own. Anwar could overlook Massoud's slight pretensions, such as his omnipresent white steed, as he

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[124] "In Taraki's time at beginning of Jihad, Massoud went to Nuristan. He was some time with them, he worked with them, he took part there, and then came back to Pakistan," Ayoub interview, 12 December 2004, p. 27.

[125] Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 11 June 1994, pp. 8-9.

coached him in Nuristani-style guerrilla tactics. The former sub-district administrator and clan chief was also acutely aware of the challenges warfare posed to civilian populations, and spoke openly about such issues.

For Massoud, whose astute management of civil affairs would later become a hallmark of his success as a military commander, this was a formative period. Anwar seems to have opened his protégé's eyes for the first time to a military commander's responsibilities for housing, nutrition and public health.[126] It was also when Massoud took to wearing his trademark Chitrali cap, an all-season garment traditionally worn by the Nuristani. Reminiscent of Guevara's beret, the rolled-woolen cover, which became iconic during the war against the Soviets, was enduring evidence of Massoud's time in Kamdesh. Finally, Anwar's atheism, well known throughout Nuristan and clearly to blame for many of his later political failings, reinforced for the young militant the tremendous power of political Islam.[127]

Massoud would soon have the chance to apply the lessons he learned in Nuristan, and those gained from

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[126]Anwar stressed the importance of civil administration for the success of the 1978-79 rebellion he led. Although he lacked Massoud's Kabul contacts or level of technical education, both men shared a similar and practical sense of nationalism. Anwar interview February-March 1992.

[127]Roy states that "Already [by early 1979] there were signs of the tension which was to develop between the traditional tribal chiefs, such as Amin Anwar, a Khan of the Kom, and the fundamentalist mullahs like Mullah Rustam (Kom) and Mullah Afzal (Kati)," Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 100. Although Roy makes no specific mention of Anwar's atheism, it was acknowledged by Anwar in an interview with Richard Strand and this author in February 1992. Strand has said it was "a well-known fact" in Kamdesh.

Maulana Faizani, Niazi and Abdur Rahman and others in Kabul, as he began planning what he hoped would be a successful return to the Panjsher Valley.

Chapter 4, The Militants Return, May 18 - June 10, 1979.

Out of Pakistan

On May 18, 1979, about an hour and a half after leaving Peshawar, a bus carrying Massoud and twenty-four other militants pulled up to the gates of the Mohmand Agency.[1] Like the other six tribal agencies along the Afghan border, the Mohmand Tribe in 1979 enjoyed virtual sovereignty over its territory, although it lay within Pakistan.[2] Once the militants crossed into the tribal area, they did not expect to have much trouble reaching the border; until they got through the gates of the arid, sparsely-populated region, however, everything remained uncertain.[3] That morning, Fred Halliday, a foreign affairs analyst in London, had written in an op-ed piece in the New York Times: "The highland snows are melting in Afghanistan and the dissident tribesmen now face the choice of returning to their homes for spring planting or using the greater mobility of the warmer months to step up

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[1] Hafiz Mansur records the militants' departure from Peshawar as having occurred on May 18, 1979. He says the two groups "returned back from Peshawar on Saur 27, 1358," Mansur, Diary of Jihad (Kabul: Jamiat Islami Political Office, 1991), p. 3. Es-Haq generally concurs, saying that preparations, which took about ten weeks, began in "the month of March or April," Es-Haq interview 14 April 1995, p. 8.

[2] See Olaf Caroe, The Pathans, on origins of the Federally Administered Tribal Agencies.

[3] Two years later the 2,296-square-kilometre agency's population was recorded to be 163,933 or about 71 persons per square kilometre. See 1981 census report of Federally Administered Tribal Areas by Population Census Organization, Statistics Division, Islamabad, published August 1984, pp. 11-12.

harassment of Government forces."[4] For Massoud, it appears to have been an easy choice.

Wary of interference by Pakistani authorities, Massoud had insisted that only Rabbani and four other senior Jamiat members be told of their departure from Peshawar.[5] Ever since the kidnapping and presumed murder of Jan Mohammad during the last days of the Bhutto regime,[6] Massoud and the militants had felt unsafe in Pakistan; if word of their plan to start a rebellion in the Tajik Panjsher Valley, a principal stronghold of Afghanistan's Persian-nationalistic tradition, leaked out, Hekmatyar and the ISI would certainly have tried to stop them. The militants were also on a tight budget and for that reason – as well as to protect the secrecy of the mission - they took only a minimal amount of arms. Tarjuman Abdul Haq, one of the rising figures in the movement with good connections in Peshawar, had procured a few weapons in the bazaar, including two Kalashnikov AK-47s. The militants also obtained six Pakistani pistols, five Stigen machine guns, one Shildouz machine gun, fifty grenades, thirteen other assorted firearms, and ammunition.[7] Rabbani had

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[4] Fred Halliday, "Tough Choices for Afghanistan's Regime and Its Opponents," New York Times, 18 May 1979.
[5] Agha Gul interview, 19 June 1994, pp. 1-2; Haroun Mir interview, 8 October 2004.
[6] According to Massoud, Jan Mohammad was probably killed after Zia ul-Haq replaced Bhutto, Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 8.
[7] Mansur, Diary of Jihad, p.4. Also, Massoud recalls that the group had one or two Stigen guns. Es-Haq mentions that the group "borrowed some guns from Haji Zaman from Darahi Adam Khiel." "He was Pakistani and a very nice man," Es-Haq interview, 14 April 1995, p. 8.

given the men one hundred thousand Afghanis (equivalent to about U.S. 3,000), possibly received during his visit to Saudi Arabia, "for travel and war expenditures."[8] For a group that hoped to overthrow a superpower-backed government, it was a modest beginning.

Since it was likely the bus would be stopped at police check-posts, including at the entrance to the Mohmand Agency, transport of the weapons was entrusted to Pashtun smugglers whom the militants arranged to meet outside the small border town of Bajawar.[9] A few Pakistani Pashtuns travelling in a truck would attract less attention in the North-West Frontier Province than a busload of Persian-speaking Afghans. The militants planned to embark from Bajawar on their overland journey through Nuristan.

Once through the gates of the Mohmand Agency, the remaining one hundred kilometres north to Bajawar must have taken the militants nearly two hours. There were no more check-posts and they arrived around 09.00 hours. Pulling up to the pre-arranged rendezvous point, just outside of Bajawar, Massoud and the others were relieved to see the smugglers waiting on the side of the road.

After collecting their weapons and paying the men, the militants stuffed their heavy load into backpacks and strode off toward the Afghan border several hundred metres

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[8] Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 10.
[9] Agha Gul interview, 19 June 1994, p. 1.

beyond. Once inside Afghanistan, they stopped to eat the breakfast they carried with them before offering thanks for the meal and their safe return home.

The Amirate of Parwan and Kapisa

On arriving, Massoud could not have but felt a sense of pride: after four years of living with the burden of the failed 1975 rebellion, he was finally on the march again. Before leaving the Jamiat headquarters in Pakistan, Massoud recalled, "Elections were held to choose the responsible authourities for each province. As a result I was elected the responsible authourity for Parwan and Kapisa."[10]

He had been a key leader of the nationalists since Niazi's death in 1970, and with his charisma and sense of history, Massoud was probably chosen without consideration of other candidates. The election, however, formalized his capacity to select (or approve the selection of) the men who accompanied him on the mission to the Panjsher. In exchange, the men pledged to recognize him as "Amir," or leader.[11] The great majority of them came from Parwan Province and all were Jamiat members, and while recognizing Rabbani as their spiritual leader, they knew that by joining the expedition they were subordinating themselves directly to the front. The group enjoyed an

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[10]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview 6 June 1994, p. 10; Agha Gul interview 19 June 1994.
[11]Es-Haq interview 14 April 1995, p. 8.

uncomplicated, rather informal organizational structure, but although no nominal ranks were issued other than that of Amir, there was a clear chain of command involving seven principal figures.

Massoud's first deputy was Mohammad Ghaus, who was also his kinsman and brother-in-law. A MiG-23 pilot who had been trained in the USSR in the late 1960s, Ghaus had been arrested in the 1974 plot to overthrow Daoud and the communists. Unlike the rest of the 300 officers arrested with him, who had gone before PDPA firing squads, Ghaus, along with Agha Gul and three other detainees, were released in mid-1976.[12] Through this experience Ghaus came to fill a unique moral position within the organization while enjoying an informal but elder-sibling-type relationship with the less detail-oriented Massoud, who looked up to the professional military officer.

Massoud's second principal deputy was his long-time roommate and confidant Kifayetullah Mustafa, who had studied chemical engineering at Kabul University. Mustafa had co-founded the exiled nationalist faction with Jan Mohammad and Massoud, and in the group's elections he was chosen to be the "head of the Panjsher District."[13] Mustafa, who could read English, had studied explosives and various weapons systems and was considered the group's

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[12]Agha Gul interview, 15 June 1994, p. 3. Agha Gul noted that they had been "freed separately," though apparently as the result of a single deal, probably involving personal connections and cash.
[13]Mansur, Diary of Jihad, p. 4.

chief tactician. "More of an ideologue than Ghaus," according to Agha Gul, the athletic Mustafa wrote humourous poetry in his spare time.[14]

Beneath Ghaus and Mustafa in the chain of command came Massoud's slightly younger brother, Ahmad Zia, who was just out of high school and served as the Amir's secretary. Zia had spent several years with Massoud in exile and, although reserved and far less politically inclined then his brother, possessed a similar poise and quickly gained the respect of the other militants.[15]

Tarjuman Abdul Haq, who had joined the nationalists in Peshawar, hailed from the Balai town of Dasht-i-Rewat and had spent a couple of months with Massoud in Nuristan that winter. He was well-acquainted with the territory between Bajawar and the village of Linar where the militants would enter the Panjsher Valley, and would serve as the group's guide on the trek. According to Mansur, Abdul Haq was "responsible for relations with [upper] Panjsher,"[16] and thus also played a key political role in the mission.

Zabet Agha Gul, a tall, courtly, German-trained former Kabul gendarme officer who had shared a jail cell with Mohammad Ghaus in Demazang Prison following the 1974 plot, served as the group's quartermaster. Karimallah

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[14]Agha Gul interview, 15 June 1994, p. 3; Es-Haq interview, 14 April 1995, pp. 2, 8.
[15]In 2004, three years after Massoud's death, Zia became Hamid Karzai's vice president.
[16]Mansur, Diary of Jihad, p. 4.

Khan, also a senior Jamiat member, led the group that would split off in Linar and head for Tagab in Kapisa Province, and thus was recognized as "Deputy Commander" of Parwan and Kapisa. Finally, Mawlawi Abdul Latif, the amiable chief mullah of Bazarak, served as the group's chaplain and "head of propaganda."[17] The men appear to have become well-acquainted in Pakistan and, sharing many personal and political bonds as well as a strong belief in their mission, bonded quickly as their journey back to Afghanistan became more difficult.

Trek through Nuristan

Tarjuman Abdul Haq had chosen a route that would take them from Bajawar through eastern Nuristan over the Kunnival Pass and down into the village of Linar on the edge of the Panjsher. Kunar Province was still under the control of the nationalist Samiullah Safi's Kunar Shuna; although his organization would be displaced by Hezb-i-Islami two months hence, at the time there seemed to be little probability of the Jamiat group being intercepted. Despite the low risk, they posted sentries each night outside their encampments, generally in various village mosques. Additionally, the Associated Press reported on May 3 that U.S. intelligence sources believed that "the Soviet Union had supplied 12 rocket-armed helicopter

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[17]Ibid., p.4.

gunships to Afghanistan and that Soviet pilots might be flying them," so there was some danger of attack from the air.[18]

The Nuristanis, as expected, received the party with hospitality, and the militants apparently made no secret of their plans. The villagers had little, if any, contact with the government, and with the success of their own local Nuristani rebellion near its peak and news still trickling in of the massive Herat uprising, it was logical to them that the Panjsheris would be launching their own rebellion.

In one village, the chief, who had become acquainted with Massoud and Abdul Haq the previous winter, presented the group with a gift of two captured rocket-propelled grenade launchers and seven shells.[19] In other villages, feasts were held to fortify the travellers before the most difficult part of their journey over the Kunnival Pass.

About five days later, and eighteen days after leaving Peshawar, Tarjuman Abdul Haq guided the twenty-four exhausted, sunburned, and bruised men into the small village of Linar on the southeast edge of the Panjsher Valley. The militants' plan was to make their base in this border settlement until the ground was prepared for their return to the Panjsher.[20] One of Massoud's first

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[18]Agha Gul interview, 19 June 1994, p. 2. "Afghans Said to Obtain Soviet Copter Gunships," New York Times, 4 May 1979.
[19]Mansur, Diary of Jihad, p. 4; Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 10.
[20]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 11.

acts was to dispatch a messenger to Safid Chihr, the largest town in the upper Panjsher, to inform a man named Pahlawan Ahmad Jan that the party had arrived.

Pahlawan, or "wrestler," Ahmad Jan had competed in the 1968 and 1972 Olympic Games and was without doubt the most famous living Panjsheri. Like Massoud, the son of a military officer, he had transferred from the Military High School after his first year to the Physical Training High School to overcome a frail condition.[21] Like other figures who have gone through major transformations, Ahmad Jan appears to have possessed a strong will. His wrestling career flourished and with it came significant political stature.[22] Following the communist takeover, Ahmad Jan, supported by another well-known wrestler, Agha Shrin, and his brother Waissuddin, organized an anti-communist cell of seventy to eighty men in Kabul.[23]

Whether or not this group had links to Faizani's former organization, Ahmad Jan appears to have been more nationally-oriented than Islamically-minded. When two prominent Panjsheri communists warned Ahmad Jan in early 1979 that the government might arrest him, the Olympian-turned-anti-communist-organizer fled the capital for the Panjsher.[24]

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[21]Biography of Pahlawan Ahmad Jan provided by his father, Mohammad Sediq. Mohammad Sediq interview, 22 February 1995, p. 1.
[22]Anwar Jegdaleq interview, 20 February 1995, p. 5.
[23]Mohammad Sediq interview, 28 February 1995, p. 2.
[24]Mia Gul interview, 20 February 1995, p. 4; Anwar Jegdalek interview, 20 February 1995, p. 6; Mohammad Sediq interview, 22 February 1995, p. 2.

Massoud had first contacted Ahmad Jan the previous winter through a man in Kabul named Arif. Though little is known about this individual, who went by the code-name Ahmad Khan and was a relative of Massoud's, it is possible that he was connected to Hezb-i-Tauhid and the late mystic, Mawlawi Faizani. It is known that he possessed a wide network, particularly in the military in Kabul, but also among athletes, and may have been heading elements of Faizani's organization at the time. "It was through [Arif] that we were in touch with Ahmad Jan and to some extent with the Panjsher," Massoud later acknowledged.[25]

Communication with Arif most likely began shortly after the communist takeover in April 1978. Through those discussions, in which Ghaus seems to have played a central role, the militants gained confidence that they could win acceptance in the Panjsher if they were able to form a partnership with Ahmad Jan.[26] There were several reasons for this belief. First, given his fame, Ahmad Jan was naturally a more effective public face for a developing popular movement than Massoud, who, though from a leading family, remained largely unknown at the time. Second, Ahmad Jan had remained in the country and, through Arif and perhaps others, had good contacts inside the military.

The third, and most pressing, issue was tied to local

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[25]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 11. Arif was the leader of the "Chandawal uprising" and appears to have died in that event.

[26]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 10; Agha Gul interview, 6 June 1994, p. 2.

politics. The militants knew that they would have to overcome a longstanding cultural divide in the Panjsher Valley. Here the inclusive politics of Faizani, which had brought Ahmad Jan and Arif together, may have been a key factor in securing the former's support for the second Panjsher uprising, much as it had been in the founding of the Islamic movement in 1970.

The Bala Strategy

Historically, the Panjsher Valley has been divided at the town of Sha'bah into two culturally and economically autonomous regions, one in the northeast and the other in the southwest. Over the years the two areas — known as the Bala and the Pa'een, or, literally-translated, the "up" and the "down" — developed subtly distinct cultures, as differences ranging from diet to politics emerged between them. The discovery in the mid-1970s of emeralds in the Bala widened the divide, as new mining income augmented that more open and fertile region's already superior agricultural output. Massoud, Jagran Ghaus, Kifayetullah Mustafa and Mawlawi Latif were all from the Pa'een. Among the core group of formerly exiled militants, only Tarjuman Abdul Haq was from the Bala, having grown up in the town of Dasht-i-Rewat above Safid Chihr.[27]

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[27]Agha Gul was from Jabal as-Siraj, the town immediately below the southern entrance of the Panjsher.

To unite the entire valley behind their group, it was clear that the militants would need the support of a number of prominent Balais. Ahmad Jan had returned to Safid Chihr earlier that year. In an area that for centuries had lionized great wrestlers, and is said by locals to have been first settled by the son of a famous wrestler, the 33-year-old former Olympian would be an ideal front man for the new movement.

Massoud would later describe the unsuccessful 1975 rebellion, in the Pa'een town of Rukha, as having been "the most difficult period of my life. The people were against me, my family was against me, the government was searching for us; we were near starvation."[28] Following this experience, it was a natural decision for the militants to initiate their 1979 effort in the Bala rather than in the Pa'een. Although now, unlike four years earlier, segments of the Pa'een were ripe for rebellion, Massoud and the others knew that they would need to move cautiously in the lower valley where a large number of people, particularly in Rukha and Bazarak, supported the new government. The reason for this was simple: in part because of the lower region's infertile lands and its historic ties to the capital, a large percentage of the Pa'een's population worked in Kabul as soldiers,

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[28]Massoud made this comment in 1997 as the Taliban besieged Shamali, although four years earlier in an interview with the author he had cited late 1979 as his most challenging period. Haroun Mir interview, 21 August 2004.

bureaucrats, shopkeepers and servants; individuals whose livelihoods were linked to the government were naturally more reluctant to oppose it.[29]

Conversely, in the Bala most men worked as farmers, herdsmen or miners, and thus remained apart from Kabul politics. Much of the upper valley at this time was accessible only by horse, so government officials rarely ventured off the main road and almost never travelled up the valley beyond the town of Dasht-i-Rewat, where the rough dirt road ended. From there, the Panjsher continued approximately twenty-five kilometres northeast to the Anjuman Pass, which leads into Badakhshan Province.[30] "Massoud and the others knew that isolation from the national government enabled people in the upper Bala to look at political questions in black and white," a former political advisor to the guerrilla leader commented.[31] This, along with the Balais' Islamic puritanism and links to neighbouring Nuristan, the militants believed, would incline the population to support a military campaign, particularly if it was presented in a traditional, Persian-centric political context.[32] If Ahmad Jan and highlanders offered their support, the militants knew it was probable that they would see the campaign through with

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[29]Additionally, their tough upland culture made them some of the most reliable individuals in the country. See Elphinstone's second description of the Tajiks, note 1 in the introduction.
[30]The Anjuman Pass has generally been considered the end of the valley, though the last villages of Paryan are some five kilometres before it.
[31]Haroun Mir interview, 16 September 2004.
[32]Es-Haq interview, 16 September 1994, p. 1.

the same determination with which they pursued most endeavours.

Uniting the Khans

During his first night in Linar, Massoud met Ahmad Jan, who persuaded him to abandon the plan to remain in Linar, and to enter secretly the valley while leaving the rest of the party at the camp.[33] Massoud, eager to make contact with as many khans and elders in the Bala as he could, was willing to go. They planned to establish a base at the house of Ahmad Jan's paternal cousin in Mukuni.[34] During Massoud's absence, Ghaus would oversee gunnery practice and military drills in Linar to keep the men focused on the coming challenge.[35]

The next morning, about three hours after Massoud and his group set off from Linar, the first mud houses of the upper Panjsher came into view. It was a moment Massoud had spent four years in exile waiting for.[36] Not wanting to attract attention, the group went directly to Mukuni where they assembled a group of local activists who happily offered Massoud their support, agreeing to make another house in the village available to the militants as a shelter and base. But not all who met the young rebel were as enthusiastic about the prospects of a Nuristani-

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[33]Agha Gul interview, 19 June 1994, p. 2.
[34]Mohammad Sediq interview, 28 February 1995, p. 5.
[35]Ibid., pp. 3, 5; Agha Gul interview, 19 June 1994, p. 2.
[36]Though he had made several clandestine trips to Kabul, there is no record indicating that he had been back to Panjsher since 1975.

style rebellion. Even one of the front's strongest supporters was frank about the commander's immaturity. "Usually people in Panjsher don't gather around a young man who is still called a 'bacha,'" commented Mohammad Pannar, using the Persian word for boy.[37]

To overcome anxiety about his youth and inexperience, Massoud embarked on a letter-writing campaign. The tactic was intended both to begin laying the basis for a valley-wide movement and to convince his inner circle of new supporters in the Bala that he had the necessary leadership qualities. His missives, as he later described them, were both reverent and assertive.

> I asked the people from each village about the number of clans living in their respective villages, who their khans and famous clergymen were. I asked about their local problems. Afterwards I wrote letters to these people telling them that they were representatives of mine, and I asked them to tell me how many armed men they had and particularly to tell me the number of their unarmed men. This was very important work. I wrote letters, signed and stamped them, and got them distributed from the beginning to the end of Panjsher. Almost everyone was opposed to the government. Now the question was how to bring them together.[38]

Messengers were secretly dispatched to carry these appeals to men believed to be sympathetic to the cause. They were often invited to clandestine night-time meetings. As a result of these efforts the youth of the Bala, who traditionally participated in local skirmishes, became, in

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[37] Pannar interview, January 1995, p. 6.
[38] Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, June 1994, pp. 11-12.

the words of one, "very enthusiastic for the fight against the communists."[39]

Massoud soon saw for himself — as he had been told by others — how dramatically the political situation had changed since his perilous escape from the valley four years earlier. While in 1975 President Daoud may have been unpopular in the Panjsher for nationalizing the local emerald mines and forging close ties with the USSR, he had posed little direct threat to the Balais and therefore had been tolerated. In contrast, by June 1979 the Communist regime was viewed with far greater disdain. The government's radical political activities in places such as Kunar and Herat, combined with the successful rebellion in neighbouring Nuristan, convinced many in the Bala that they would eventually have to fight. In particular, the killing of several clerics in Bazarak had a profound effect on people's feelings about the regime.[40] At the time of Massoud's arrival, two other resistance factions — Harikat-Islami and Hezb-i-Islami — were already operating in the Panjsher, though neither had gained significant support.[41] The valley was a hotbed of discontent in search of capable leadership.

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[39]Pannar interview, 10 October 1994, p. 2.
[40]Sa'duddin Khan interview, June 1994.
[41]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 11. Also, Es-Haq points out that "Gulbuddin had sent men trying to contact influential people," although these efforts, by a Pashtun whose anti-nationalist views were already known, appear to have garnered little support in the nationalist-oriented Panjsher Valley, Es-Haq interview, 14 April 1994, p. 9.

Putting the Theory of Revolution into Practice

Revolutions are often driven more by fear of oppression than by actual exposure to it, for once the cycle of totalitarian violence begins, it is extremely difficult to break. Successful anti-totalitarian resistance fighters must therefore seize the moment when fears are sufficiently heightened to sustain popular action, but governmental controls are not strong enough to block them. Having studied a number of wars, Massoud knew that timing was critical: in 1975 it had been too early to engender mass support; by late 1979 it might be too late. Hezb might start a drive to displace the traditional leadership (as it would in Nuristan in July 1979 and in the neighbouring Andareb Valley in early 1981), or the state might increase political control in the area to prevent such an action and co-opt the traditional leadership (as it vainly attempted to do in April 1980).

Massoud returned to the Panjsher at a time when only about twenty government troops were stationed in the Bala. An increase of only one hundred and eighty soldiers, or two infantry companies, would expand the militants' challenge by a significant order of magnitude. "While there still had been no arrests, and certainly no killings by the Khalquis in the Bala, we knew from the stories coming out of Kabul that it was only a matter of time before we started having our own problems," as one local

leader later remembered the deteriorating situation.[42] The militants based their plan on forming an alliance with the khans at the moment when that group's discontent with the government was swelling, but before either the communists or Hezb could undermine the khans' traditional authourity.

Within two weeks of Massoud's return to Panjsher, three of the most respected Bala clans — the Bakaw Khail, represented by Haji Zahir, nephew of the Malik[43] of Safid Chihr, and the Malik's brother, Gulestan Khan, both kinsmen of Pahlawan Ahmad Jan's; the Abdullah Khail, also represented by Ahmad Jan and also a Safid Chihri clan; and the Dahane Rewati clan, headed by Haji Abdul Matin — had offered their full support, while perhaps a dozen other Balai traditional leaders made lesser commitments in response to the secret invitations[44]. Though probably many of the local leaders intended to take a "wait and see" attitude, as long as the valley remained under the government's control, the militants were not yet ready for active supporters. Once the rebellion commenced, Massoud hoped that the vague pledges from the other Balai groups would turn into more substantial popular support.

Within one week of gaining the khans' support and confident that he could count on key people in Dasht-i-Rewat, Massoud summoned Jagran Ghaus and the rest of the men who were still in Linar to join him. The twenty-odd

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[42]M. Arab interview, June 1994, p. 1.
[43] An appointed governmental post, essentiallythat of "mayor."
[44] Aziz interview, 12 October 1994, p. 8.

rebels arrived within a few days and they were treated by the population of Dahane Rewat to a sumptuous feast at the home of Haji Matin. It would be remembered years later as a turning point in the development of the rebellion.

Somehow, with all their ambition and exuberance, the young militants, primarily Kabul-educated and from the Pa'een and Shamali, won the respect of the tough old highlanders. Although opposites in many regards, the two groups held common beliefs about religion and freedom, and seem to have united that evening in a campaign against the Taraki regime.

Winning the support of the prominent headmen of the Bala removed some of the pressure from Massoud and his group. However, security remained a major concern. The government had a post seven kilometres down the road from Mukuni in Zenay, and it was known that officials there were "seriously investigating" reports about the militants' activities and conducting sweeps of the local mountains.[45] If details of the rebels' location and plans leaked out, an attempt would certainly be made to arrest them. Such an action, even if the militants fled, would likely upset the fragile political balance that was rapidly turning in their favour. The militants were counting on residents from the Bala to fight the rebellion. As Massoud recalled, "The groups that were

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[45]Mohammad Sediq interview, 22 February 1995, p. 3.

fighting with us were the local groups that were mobilized by us. Among the people who had come from [Pakistan], only three persons, including me, Mustafa, and Agha Sharin from Jabal as-Siraj, were engaged in fighting." For this reason the task of identifying prospective combatants and bringing them into the militants' ranks was central to the plan of the rebellion.[46]

To reduce the risk of detection and to facilitate the integration of new recruits, Massoud divided the group: half the men remained in Dahane Rewat, while the other half joined him at the base he had established in Mukuni about five kilometres down the valley, above Safid Chihr. In both locations, the young militants quietly worked to "organize and form groups, and carry out training," while laying low to avoid notice by government officials.[47] Shortly before this bifurcation, Jagran Ghaus had set out for Kabul to establish contact with Arif and other sympathizers in the military and to assess the situation in the capital. All the while, Massoud and Mustafa shuttled back and forth between the two camps to begin the initiation of several exceptional Balai leaders into their organization.

Although rumours may have trickled through the valley about the militants' presence, some even alleging that they were Chinese, the rebels' identities and especially

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[46]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 13.
[47]Aziz interview, 7 October 1994, p. 9.

the locations of their safe houses remained a tightly guarded secret, even from some of the most trusted chiefs they had contacted. Despite these precautions, a couple of weeks after their arrival the militants received a disturbing report: the government had become convinced of their presence in the Bala and was planning to bomb the region.[48] Alarmed, Massoud sent for Haji Zahir, a stout energetic man who was one of the most capable leaders of the Bakaw Khailis clan, and with whom the rebel commander was developing a close relationship. Massoud "met me to say that the government intended to bomb Safid Chihr and Dasht-i-Rewat, aimed at putting pressure on inhabitants to rise up against us," Zahir recalled. "He told me to go and prevent the plan from being fulfilled."[49] Zahir at once agreed to go to the provincial capital in Charikar and speak with the governor to refute the allegation that the town was harbouring rebels.

Failing to find the governor, Zahir travelled to Kabul, where he persuaded the Minister of Public Affairs, whom he knew, to call the president's office and cancel any attacks that were possibly being planned.[50] That Massoud, some three weeks after his arrival in the valley, was already manipulating events on a national level, even if in a small way, was testament both to his own

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[48]Similar bombing had taken place earlier in the year in Herat and Nuristan.
[49]Haji Zahir interview, 11 April 1995, p. 1.
[50]Ibid., p. 1.

competence and to the fragility of the Communist regime's position in early June 1979.

While it is not clear how firm the government's plans to bomb Safid Chihr actually were, Zahir's manoeuvres discredited reports that had reached Kabul about the militants' activities and bought more time for the rebels. Zahir was able to use local connections to reach virtually the highest levels of the Afghan government. Massoud must have been impressed with the potential for such penetration and with the level of commitment and effectiveness of a man like Zahir. For several days following the incident, the militants continued their outreach campaign and organizing activities, though they must have realized that the risk of detection was increasing. Ironically, it was a pro-Communist mullah who would precipitate the first clash.

Outbreak of the Rebellion

In mid-June, Faqir Ahmad Tufan, a minor cleric in Dasht-i-Rewat with links to government security forces, discovered through one of his agents the location of the militants' safehouse. He then communicated with 'Alaqadar Faizuddine, who immediately gathered a small force and sped off up the valley.[51]

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[51]Mohammad Ayoub interview, May 1995, p. 3.

The militants were staying in the house of a man named Mir Alam and did not know that the attack was coming. Nearby, some twelve to twenty-five of them were "busy with their affairs inside the mosque when they were besieged by the soldiers. When small boys saw the soldiers around the mosque, they went inside and informed the Mujahedin."[52] With the first shots of the attackers, the men inside hit the floor and crawled to their guns. They knocked out a few low timbers in the walls of the building and returned fire. "Commander Ibrihim was at home when the war broke out. He jumped out through the window and took position."[53] Within minutes, some forty rebels came to the aid of the trapped fighters.

The government troops, inexperienced in such operations, had attacked from quite a distance and were not able to direct their fire accurately. However, they had managed to cover most of the possible escape routes, thus trapping the militants and producing a stalemate as other rebels moved to surround the government forces. Under continual heavy fire, Mohammad Gada, the senior rebel leader, dispatched a runner to inform Massoud and his group in Mukuni of the attack before government reinforcements could come up the valley. The 'Alaqadar must have been thinking along the same lines; shortly after the attack started, his jeep was seen headed down

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[52]Ibid., p. 4.
[53]Ghaffar interview, 10 October 1994, p. 5.

the valley, much to the rebels' alarm. "The danger at that time was that the jeep of 'Alaqadar had passed towards the lower portion of the valley going very fast," Massoud remembered. "We were anxious that it would come back" with reinforcements.[54]

Making their way down from Mukuni, Massoud and a group of militants ran into Haji Zahir, fast becoming one of Massoud's most trusted Balai lieutenants. Massoud, who was on his way to the scene of the engagement, was "holding a gun in his hand, running down," Zahir recalled. "He wanted to block the road in Awreng at the mouth of a gully. He instructed me to gather people for the battle."[55] They agreed that Massoud's group would head down by foot to ensure that the defences were sufficient to stop any reinforcements; Zahir would continue up the trail to Mukuni to pick up Ahmad Jan and more armed men, and then drive up the valley by automobile.

Arriving in Dahane Rewat a short time later, Zahir came under fire from rebel forces who mistook his men for government troops. The first rebel casualties of the uprising were thus caused by friendly fire.

Meanwhile, as Massoud's party arrived in Awreng just below Dasht-i-Rewat, they discovered that several young men from the local village of Ghrenju had already erected a barricade of cut timbers and large rocks at the point

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[54]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 12.
[55]Haji Zahir interview, 11 April 1995, p. 2.

where the road rises from the sandy flood plains and begins to climb steeply toward Dasht-i-Rewat.[56] With the road secured, the villagers stood by with flintlock muskets and shotguns to attack any government forces that might try to come back up the road. They had set up their post at the very spot where Massoud wanted to block government reinforcements — it was an example of the initiative and intelligence that would benefit the revolt over the coming weeks. Leaving behind a few men armed with PPSh machine guns to reinforce the local fighters, Massoud and his party continued up the valley.[57]

At about midday, other rebels surrounded the emerald mines, where the soldiers quickly surrendered, handing over not only their rifles and ammunition but also a large quantity of dynamite from the mines. The liberation of the mines, which the government of Prince Daoud had recently nationalized, provoked tremendous excitement among the villagers. More importantly, the captured dynamite would prove critical in the upcoming campaign in the Salang.[58]

Word quickly spread of the rebels' victory. They followed up their initial success by counterattacking, killing 'Alaqadar Faizuddine along with some of his soldiers and arresting several others.

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[56]Aziz interview, 12 October 1994, p. 10.
[57]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 11.
[58]Mohammad Pannar interview, January 1995, p. 41; Ayoub interview, May 1995, p. 2.

As Massoud arrived at the centre of Dasht-i-Rewat, he was received by an ecstatic crowd. Yet the young rebel did not lose his composure. While the government's initial attack up the valley had been repulsed, Massoud was worried about a new attack from below. More than fifty men, including the groups from Ghrenju now under the command of Zahir, were assigned to defend the road. Still, Massoud was concerned. The action was moving too quickly. He needed to devise a plan before word of the clash reached the *Wuliswali,* or district headquarters, in Rukha and beyond.

Massoud spent the rest of the afternoon in Dasht-i-Rewat, strategizing with Pahlawan Ahmad Jan, who had been slightly wounded in the leg during the fighting, as well as Mustafa and others. "At night Ahmad Shah Massoud divided [the] Mujahedins into four groups of twenty members. Only the distinguished individuals were chosen for the [combat] groups."[59] Massoud selected Zahir as one of the group commanders. "I was told to separate my men and move toward Sha'bah and work out the plan of fighting," the important clan leader later said.[60]

In less than one month, Massoud and the militants had succeeded in expanding their active cadre nearly four-fold, while conducting a broad outreach in the Bala to sustain mass support for a rebellion against the Taraki

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[59]Aziz interview, June 1994, p. 4.
[60]Haji Zahir interview, 11 April 1995, p. 4.

regime. Critical to the effort's success was Massoud's ability to unify the Panjsheris. As Ayoub, who had earlier secured Massoud's release from Pakistani detention, later recalled,

> The main thing that Massoud did at that time was that he was able to collect all Panjsher peoples under one organization, and convince them to work together. In other parts of Afghanistan, there were good commanders, good activity, but some people were with Hezb-i-Islami, some people with Jamiat, [some with] Harakat, this and that, they were fighting each other, they were denying each other. But in Panjsher he did the best thing there. He collected all the people under one name.[61]

Ayoub added that "Massoud's leadership for the people was very active. Also, because his relationship with the people, his ability to converse with the people, keeping the people happy; it was a very high level of intelligence and personality."

The success of the rebels' return was also the result of careful planning, particularly by Massoud, Ghaus, Agha Gul, Mustafa, and Tarjuman Abdul Haq. They had studied guerrilla movements from Indochina to the neighbouring Kamdesh Valley of Nuristan and their frank and inspirational communications with the influential clan leaders were as much a result of this historical framework as they were of the militants' strong personal ties with recent Afghan nationalists including Faizani, Arif, Rabbani and Anwar. In this way, Massoud and his cohorts were able to present themselves as learned envoys to the

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[61] Ayoub interview, 12 December 2004, pp. 33-34.

local chiefs while also benefiting from their own local clan affiliations. Matin, Zahir, and other prominent Balai leaders all remembered and revered Yahya Khan, Massoud's grandfather, and knew Massoud's father, Dost Mohammad, and thus the militants were perceived as *internal* representatives as much as external ones.

With the political groundwork laid, the rebels' first organized attack on the government's principal post in the Bala was about to begin.

Chapter 5, The Valley in Revolt, June-July 1979.

The Rebels' First Attack

Just before dusk of June 10, 1979, an armed, chanting crowd, approximately two hundred to three hundred strong, entered Safid Chihr.[1] Mawlawi Latif, the movement's spiritual leader, and several men stood up on the porch of one of the shops, a few feet above the crowd, and began delivering speeches on their grievances against the communists. "The communists have taken over our country, they are the enemies of Islam, and it is our duty as good Muslims to fight them," Latif proclaimed.[2]

In addition to the religious rhetoric, the speeches had a distinct note of local patriotism. "There was the idea that for the first time in our history, we as Panjsheris might play a leading role in our country's history," Es-Haq late explained in an interview. "That was enough to get a lot of people excited."[3] Neither Massoud nor any of the other young militants spoke to the group, instead, for obvious political reasons, allowing local residents to run the event.

The speeches, most of which were delivered by chiefs and mullahs, lasted for about half an hour, during which another two to three hundred people joined the militants and their supporters at the bazaar. The crowd soon

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[1] Mansur, Diary of Jihad, p. 6; Aziz interview, 6 June 1994, p. 1.
[2] Mawlawi Abdul Latif interview, 12 October 1994.
[3] Es-Haq interview, 1 December 1994.

numbered between five and six hundred, including defecting government soldiers from the emerald mines.[4] Following the conclusion of the remarks, the group, fast becoming a mob, set out down the road toward Khinj.

Many of the people who found themselves marching with the militants that first evening seem to have had little prior knowledge of the anti-Communist movement and appear to have simply gotten caught up by the tumult. Despite widespread hostility toward the government and the excitement of the moment, most must have wondered if the opposition movement could last more than a few days. Since the reign of Dost Mohammad, with few exceptions — such as the interludes prior to the first British occupation of Kabul in 1839 and Abdur Rahman's return in 1880, and the Kalakani takeover in 1929 — the valley had always been under the control of a central government.

Although not a single person in the entire Bala Valley had been arrested since 1978, a few had been interrogated by the 'Alaqadar prior to his death that morning, and now that violence had erupted, a threat by the new government clearly existed. The New York Times reported in June that the rebels included "Moslem traditionalists, infuriated by measures that they feel undermine their religious principles, and a large rural

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[4] Aziz interviews, 6 June 1994, p. 1, and March 1996.

element that violently opposes the regime's land reforms."[5] The success of the Nuristani rebellion provided a positive precedent, but even that uprising put little direct pressure on the government. Furthermore, the Nuristanis, having endured forced conversions to Islam and integration into the country in the 1890s, were not considered real Afghans, as indicated by the continued use of the suffix "stan" (meaning land or nation).[6] Thus, the Panjsheris perceived the rebellion in the neighbouring region more as a local affair than as the first rumbling of a nationwide movement.

The events in distant Herat did demonstrate the crippling effects that an uprising, when directed against urban and strategic centres, could have on the central government. But the Panjsheris on that first day could not have gauged the probability of achieving a similar result in the northeast. As traders and travellers, the Panjsheris, particularly some of the khans like Matin, knew that their country had been under increasing Soviet pressure for twenty-two years. As one of the young Safid Chihri leaders who had participated in the capture of the emerald mine that day put it, "We also revolted [like the Nuristani and Heratis] in the hope of overthrowing the

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[5] Robert Trumbull, "Insurgency Poses Growing Threat To Afghanistan's Pro-Soviet Rulers," New York Times, 24 June 1979.
[6] For more on the Afghans' view of the Nuristanis, see Jones, Men of Influence in Nuristan.

communist regime. We considered it a big shame not to be part of Jihad against the communists."[7]

With the momentum from the victory over the 'Alaqadar and the growing strength of the mob, Massoud decided to attack the *'Alaqadari*, or sub-district headquarters, located in Zenay. He divided the men into three groups and, moving south from Khinj, sent one group to the northeast of Zenay and one to the northwest, leaving one unit with him in the middle.[8] The plan was to triangulate fire on the post from positions a few hundred metres away, but as most of the men were armed with hunting weapons and had never seen combat prior to that morning, preparing for the assault was time-consuming. Massoud had to help each group find suitable cover in the darkness and instruct them on what to do once the fighting began. Tarjuman Abdul Haq and Haji Zahir led the two flanking groups while Mustafa led the group in the centre.[9]

Early the next morning the militants were arranging their forces when shots rang out. One overly excited villager opened fire with his pistol and both sides

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[7] Pannar interview, January 1995, p. 6. Other rebellions had taken place in Hazarajat, Paktia Province, Konar Province and other areas, as reported by the U.S. embassy in Kabul. See confidential State Department cable from Bruce J. Amstutz, Embassy Kabul, 6 September 1979, No. 06697. See also "Revolt Reported in Afghan Province," Reuters dispatch in New York Times, 8 January 1979; "Insurgency Spreading," Agence France Press, 30 January 1979, cited in Index to Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report, Middle East and Africa, 31 January 1979; "Foes of Afghan Rulers Are Hoping Skirmishes Will Bring on Rebellion," New York Times, 5 February 1979; "Moslem Tribesmen Conduct Guerrilla War in Afghan Hills, Washington Post, 11 March 1979; "Afghan Insurgency Threatening Regime," New York Times, 13 March 1979.

[8] Aziz interview, 12 October 1994, p. 10.

[9] Agha Gul interview, 19 June 1994, p. 3.

started shooting. For the second time in twenty-four hours, Massoud's plan was pre-empted by events. Moments later the machine gun atop an armoured personnel carrier in front of the post took aim at the rebels. As Massoud recalled, mayhem ensued:

> An APC arrived and started firing on us. People were firing on the APC with their guns. I was shouting to the people not to fire, but they did not care about that and continued their firing.[10]

Less than an hour after daybreak, it was the attackers who found themselves pinned down. Not knowing any better, many of the villagers fired their scarce ammunition into the hardened plates of the vehicle. The bullets bounced off harmlessly as Massoud and the others struggled to establish command.

The objective of knocking out the armoured car became paramount. Seeing little choice, Massoud decided to use one of the precious rocket-propelled grenades Mawlawi Ghafur had given the militants in Nuristan. Mustafa, who had the most experience with explosives, volunteered to take the shot, only to miss three times in a row.[11]

The fighting continued for several hours, with the government soldiers pinning down the militants. At this point, rumours — perhaps generated by Gulestan, one of the rebel leaders, who resented Massoud — began circulating

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[10]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 13.
[11]Agha Gul interview, 19 June 1994, p. 3; Aziz interview, 12 October 1994, p. 11.

among the attackers that government reinforcements were headed up the valley from Rukha to relieve the besieged post. Massoud later recounted the conversation with his deputy, Mustafa:

> It was a bad situation. If we didn't capture the 'Alaqadari, it would be a big setback. We realized that if we were defeated completely, people would surrender us to the government. I discussed the situation with Mustafa and reminded him of the '75 uprising and told him, 'If we fail again, everyone either will be killed or captured. Better to die facing the enemy than be.' And he agreed one hundred percent with me.[12]

Returning to the assembled men around nine in the morning, Massoud underscored his battle cry by taking it upon himself to destroy the armoured personnel carrier. Moving to within fifty metres of the target, he calmly took a shot with a rocket-propelled grenade, just as the vehicle turned its barrel towards him.[13] As flames engulfed the vehicle, several of its occupants escaped through the hatch and ran toward the main building. Seeing the soldiers flee, the militants rushed forward hurling hand grenades as other fighters fired repeatedly at the post. Ibrihim shot to death four soldiers cowering behind the vehicle.[14]

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[12]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 14.
[13]Agha Gul interview, 19 June 1994, p. 3; Aziz interview, 12 October 1994, p. 11; Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 15.
[14]Aziz interview, 12 October 1994, p. 11.

Inside the government building the militants found several dead and wounded.[15] Mansur puts the number of captured soldiers at thirty-five, but far more important were the two hundred assorted arms and twelve cases of ammunition that the militants seized.[16]

"Everyone wanted weapons and ammunition," Massoud recalled, "and I suddenly realized that in the future it would be a big problem."[17] Aziz amplified this prognosis, noting that while "all the Mujahidins involved in the battle made the commitment to submit all the seized weapons to the Amir.... because of lack of order, most of the Mujahidins looted the weapons."[18]

Mustering all of his presence, Massoud assembled as many men as he could and threatened that unless they immediately brought all of the weapons and bullets to the mosque, he and the other militants who had just led the villagers to victory would leave the valley.[19] The hillmen's euphoria ceased as they realized that although they had won a battle, they had just started a war. In addition to playing on the men's natural fears of anarchy, by insisting on having the weapons counted in the mosque rather than in the captured post or the school, Massoud at this key juncture began promoting the idea of collective

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[15]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 15.
[16]Mansur, Diary of Jihad, p. 6.
[17]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 16.
[18]Aziz interview, 12 October 1994, p. 11.
[19]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 11.

spiritual interests taking precedence over personal material ones. The episode demonstrated the pious young leader's ability to successfully foster a notion of political Islam, in contrast to the ultimately ineffective efforts in Nuristan by the atheist Anwar.

Yet this was but a small step on a long and difficult road. No sooner had the militants brought the captured weapons to the mosque than many of the precious arms had disappeared.

"I asked what happened to the arms," recalled Aziz, the young man who had blocked the road the previous day.

> They [Agha Gul and others] said someone had stolen them. I cursed those who committed the theft. Unknowingly, I addressed Gulestan Khan and said, "What kind of people are they? They claimed to be good Muslims but still commit crimes." He [Gulestan Khan] suddenly got mad, suddenly started quarrelling with me.[20]

Although it was obvious what had happened, Massoud decided not to aggravate the situation by publicly accusing Gulestan, whom he had never met until that morning, of the theft. Massoud had spent weeks trying to unite the clans and could not allow a single incident to pull them apart. The Bakaw Khails were still the most important group in the coalition and even if Gulestan could not be trusted, Massoud realized that "it was not necessary to flare up the flames of any skirmishes," which might risk offending Ahmad Jan and Haji Zahir. So he chose to say nothing.

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[20]Aziz interview, 12 October 1994, p. 12.

Instead, to again highlight the religious basis of the emerging movement, Massoud gathered all the mullahs and khans to discuss their next move.[21]

He asked Aziz if he was experienced with assault rifles. Although Massoud had privately encouraged Aziz to show restraint with Gulestan, the rebel commander was publicly acknowledging the young man's intellect and initiative. The militants were looking for new leaders to join their core group from Pakistan, and Aziz appeared to be a good candidate.

Two principal targets remained in the valley: an army post in the Dara-e-Hazara Valley, similar to the one the militants had just captured in Zenay; and the *Wuliswali*, or district headquarters, in Rukha. With over one hundred men, the second was by far the larger and, even without reinforcements, would put up stronger resistance. Dara, on the other hand, was a backwater, and so long as the forces there remained blocked and could not attack the rebels from the rear, they posed little threat to the main operation against the Wuliswali. With this in mind, Massoud must have been relieved when Gulestan – who had fled during the last battle, returning just in time to organize the weapons theft – volunteered to lead a force against the Dara post.[22] While Zabet Agha Gul and others were sceptical, they did not object. Gulestan left Zenay

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[21] Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 16.
[22] Ibid.

that night with about sixty to seventy fighters, heading toward the Dara Valley on the southeast side of the Panjsher River, while Massoud and the rest of the militants led several hundred people down the valley toward Bazarak.[23]

The Capture of the Pa'een

The militants formed the villagers into a column, once again putting Pahlawan Ahmad Jan at the front. In case they were attacked from the south, his men were well-armed and ready to fight. At every village the lead group would stop, causing the column, perhaps five hundred to eight hundred strong, to close ranks in the centre of the village. As Ahmad Jan, surrounded by several clerics, greeted the villagers, the fighters would lead a thunderous chant of "Allah Akbar." For people who rarely saw crowds a tenth that size, the effect of this shrieking human wave must have been profound.[24] At each stop the column was joined by more and more supporters. "As we passed through villages, youths carrying axes joined us," Mohammad Pannar remembered.[25]

The militants had tried hard to contact chiefs in the Bala, but had made less effort to contact people in the

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[23]Aziz interview, 12 October 1994, p. 13; Agha Gul interview, 19 June 1994, p. 3. Dara is the largest of some twelve side valleys that run roughly perpendicular off the Panjsher.
[24]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview 28 September 1994, p. 16.
[25]Pannar interview January 1995, p. 5.

Pa'een. "We had wanted our contacts further extended to all parts of the Panjsher, to Rukha, Bazarak, and the other villages, but [at the time of the 'Alaqadar's attack] our activity remained confined to Safid Chihr and Dasht-i-Rewat," Mohammad Pannar later explained.[26]

As it turned out, Massoud's father, Dost Mohammad, was in Kabul and would not learn of Massoud's role in the rebellion for some weeks.[27] When the column arrived in Bazarak, it was apparently a complete surprise to the townspeople. The Khan of Bazarak, Bashi Sa'duddin, provided Mawlawi Abdul Latif, Ahmad Jan and Haji Zahir with a hero's welcome. Massoud and Mustafa, meanwhile, continued to shun the limelight as they set about seeing the important men of the town. Massoud was back in the Pa'een for the first time since the ill-fated 1975 endeavour, and with thoughts of that episode fresh in his mind, he would have been very wary. It was known that the government had many supporters in the area, although so long as his "army" remained camped in the town he had little to fear.

On the way from Zenay the militants had casually inquired in different places about Communist supporters. Some residents "would say that they had no Communists, and some would say that they have hidden themselves here," but

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[26]Ibid., p. 2.
[27]Mrs. M. Ghaus interview 11 April 1995, p. 2.

usually the militants received vague answers.[28] Panjsheri villages, like most places, harboured a spectrum of political views, but generally a villager's political opponents were also his kinsmen.[29] However vehemently individuals disagreed politically, marriage and clan relationships were such that one would rarely speak ill of a villager with outsiders. Although this would change during the war, as political identities often rose above family ties, ideological differences were not clearly defined in mid-1979 and it was difficult for Massoud to get much information on the communists. There was one notable exception: his own village.

Jangalak epitomized the reasons Massoud feared the Pa'een. It was a poor village within Bazarak with little arable land, located on a rocky outcropping above the Panjsher River; many of the villagers had long since left to work in the capital. While most of Jangalak's emigrants had taken menial jobs in Kabul, several, such as Massoud's grandfather, had managed to achieve a measure of financial success. Those individuals had used their gains to send their children to institutes of higher learning and this, Massoud knew, was where the danger lay. The problem was not education itself but attendance at one of the no more than a dozen prestigious schools in the

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[28] Ahmad Shah Massoud interview 28 September 1994, p. 17.
[29] Pannar and Gulestan, for example, though from the same clan, took very different approaches to the rebellion.

capital where the Communist factions had conducted most of their recruiting during the 1960s and 1970s. Having lived in Kabul and risen to become a top student leader at one of those schools, Massoud understood the phenomenon well.[30]

For the next couple of days, the militants travelled around Bazarak semi-secretly to avoid certain prominent leftists while Mawlawi Latif and the other clerics gave anti-government speeches and organized mass prayer sessions for the crowd that had remained camped in Bazarak. As one Balai leader recalled, "During these five days a large number of people joined us and a number of mawlawis [religious scholars] were preaching in favour of Jihad."[31] Pahlawan Ahmad Jan, Haji Zahir, Mohammad Gada and a few other respected Bala men were given credit for organizing the movement.

With the political side of their operation going better than expected, the militants focused on the next military objective: the Panjsher Valley District Headquarters at Rukha, which was well fortified and, with a number of officers present, bound to put up a strong fight. Massoud and the other leaders began developing a plan involving a coordinated, multi-pronged attack, for which they would need several group leaders. The

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[30]Steve Coll, Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001 (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), p. 109.
[31]Fazel Ahmad interview, May 1995, p. 5.

militants did not lack manpower, but they had identified only a few men capable of battlefield leadership. In preparation for the battle, the militants had established a logistical base in Bazarak, where they began storing all the weapons and ammunition that they had accumulated up to that point.

On the second morning in Bazarak, Gulestan quietly slipped into town. Apparently too embarrassed to face Massoud directly, he sent for Zabet Agha Gul. "Gulestan Khan sent me a personal message saying, 'We could not capture Dara, can you help?'" Agha Gul related years later with a grin. "They had attacked the post, but the soldiers did not surrender. He was embarrassed, they had fought for a whole day and used up most of their ammunition." Agha Gul conveyed the news to Massoud, who, undoubtedly tiring of living in semi-seclusion in Bazarak, announced that he would lead an attack on the Dara post himself.[32]

Hiking quickly, they arrived in Dara around noon and found the attackers "very tense" and suffering from low morale, one of their number having been killed in the fighting. Massoud quickly devised a plan and after a brief but intense attack, the post fell. The 'Alaqadar of Dara managed to escape, but was captured a day later. The rebels returned to Bazarak late in the day, where word of

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[32]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 2; Ayoub interview, May 1995, p. 8.

Massoud's victory had already travelled.[33] Despite their elation, the militants knew that they were another day behind schedule for the attack on the Wuliswali; they must have had a sense that time was running out.

At midday the following day, government jets screeched over Bazarak and bombs fell on the ancient Panjsher town. Although the bombing did not last very long, the blasts and tall dust clouds they left behind created panic, sending the still large assembly of men fleeing into side valleys north of the town. More than a dozen people were killed and wounded, and the bridge from Bazarak to Manjahour and a school were damaged.[34] But the five-day political-religious event seems to have strengthened the villagers' resolve: Bashi Amir and Bashi Sa'duddin, the khans of Bazarak, made no effort to expel the rebels from the town.

Why it took the government four days to realize that it had a serious threat on its hands in the Panjsher is not clear. Even with the lines of communication from Zenay and Dara cut off, it is unlikely that the district headquarters went more than a few hours without learning of attacks, and its troops appear to have been anticipating an assault.

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[33]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 2; Ayoub interview, May 1995, p. 8; Fazel Ahmad interview, 1 May 1995, p. 5.
[34]Fazel Ahmad interview, 1 May 1995, p. 5; Ayoub interview, May 1995, p. 9; Aziz interview, 7 October 1994, p. 13.

Be that as it may, this indecisiveness worked in the rebels' favour. Under cover of darkness, an advance group of fifty rebels moved cautiously toward the fortress in Rukha. Having left Bazarak after dark on the day of the bombing, the men did not reach the town, some eight kilometres south of Bazarak, until close to midnight. Their instructions were to get as close as possible and attack that night to gauge the enemy's strength. The group's assault with small-calibre machine guns was quickly answered by mortars, cannon fire, heavy artillery, and scores of smaller arms. Compared to the battle at Zenay, where the Government had only one cannon mounted on an APC, the strength of the Wuliswali's response was overwhelming. Realizing that there was little they could accomplish against such force, the men pulled back and sent a report back to Massoud.[35]

By the time the runner reached Bazarak, it was in the early hours of the sixth day — June 15, according to Mansur's record.[36] Massoud apparently sent a runner back with the reassuring message that he would be arriving with reinforcements late in the day. Just a few months later the militants would not have considered entrusting the commander's plans to a runner, but at this critical time Massoud seems to have wanted to give the men as much encouragement as possible.

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[35]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 1.
[36]Mansur, Diary of Jihad, p. 6.

Later that afternoon, some of the fighters returning from the capture of the Dara 'Alaqadari were informed of a second, and larger, operation scheduled for that night, or shortly afterward. Massoud set out toward Rukha leading three hastily arranged groups.[37] Leaving a blocking force of ninety Paryanis below Karwashi and dispatching others to Hesarak, the commander climbed to a position at Chemal-Warda in the heights above the fortress where he began gathering intelligence.

Over the course of the day Massoud learned that the government had used the time since the first attack in Dahane Rewat "to strengthen its position by bringing a number of cannons, tanks, and other supplies" to the Wuliswali.[38] Seeing the strength of the government's defences, he realized that a daylight assault would be fruitless. Late in the day he sent a messenger to Karwashi with instructions for Fazel Ahmad and the other groups to meet him in Sarban for a nighttime attack. When they arrived at the village they found Massoud with a group of about ninety men. Ibrihim, who seems to have had a contact within the fort, was assigned to Aziz's thirty-man group, which would lead the attack from the Hesarak heights with long-range assault rifles.

It was a risky plan for the teams on the heights who, once their locations became known, would become easy

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[37] Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 1.
[38] Ibid.

targets for government artillery pieces. Understanding the danger, Massoud ordered the men to press the attack "no matter what the casualties are and no matter what the number killed."[39]

This time the plan worked impeccably. After three hours of fighting, in the dead of the night, the Wuliswal began evacuating en masse. "We were preparing to stage an offensive during the night, and suddenly the news spread that governmental forces had fled," Massoud said. "When we arrived at the site they had already fled."[40] For the rebels, the capture of the district seat was a dramatic victory: the valley was on its way to being liberated.

Later, the commander met with Ahmad Jan in Rukha and, still shunning the spotlight, offered the wrestler the prestigious position of "Wuliswal of the Panjsher."[41] Further raids in the town yielded seventy guns from the communist youth organization.[42] The liberation of the valley was a source of great excitement in Rukha, much as it undoubtedly was a source of grave concern in Kabul.

Determined to push home the advantage, on June 16, 1979, a large force, spurred by the capture of the Wuliswal, set out down the valley from Rukha to Gulbahar.

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[39]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 1; Fazel Ahmad interview, 1 May 1995, p. 6; Aziz interview, 7 October 1994, p. 13; Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 6 June 1994, p. 1.
[40]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 2.
[41]Throughout the war Massoud maintained the practice of appointing civil administrators, who soon became known as "Amir Panjsher," to serve beneath him. He himself, in the capacity of general commander, was known as "The Honorable Amir" or Amir Sahib.
[42]Mansur, Diary of Jihad, p. 6.

To avoid travelling during daylight, when they would be exposed to air strikes, the fighters began the thirty-kilometre journey along the main road around dusk, with Zahir again in the lead.[43]

The idea was to exit the valley, cross above Gulbahar before dawn, and surprise the government forces stationed at the sub-district headquarters in Bulaghain, just east of the town. From there the rebels would fan out to the heights to the east and west. The militants knew there would be a counterattack and planned to move into a line of defensive positions above the northeastern ridges of the Shamali plain before it happened.

As on the march from Safid Chihr to Bazarak, the group periodically halted in the significant villages south of Rukha to drum up additional support in the Pa'een. Now that the rebellion could almost claim to have "liberated the valley," recruits came quickly, as even the more pro-government villages of the lower Pa'een offered up men, young and old, to join the advance.

Additionally, as the U.S. State Department would acknowledge one month later, reports were coming out of Afghanistan that "more than 3,000 political prisoners have been executed" by the government and that there were "nightly executions of 20 to 50 people at Pol-i-Charki Prison outside Kabul." Speaking in Dubai in mid-July,

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[43]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, pp. 3-4.

Rabbani sought support for "the Afghan people who are threatened with a war of annihilation."[44]

At approximately 01.00 hours, the group entered the Dalong Sang — by far the most dangerous part of the journey: if government commandos attacked from the rear before the rebels could exit the tight mouth of the gorge — with the river on one side and sheer cliffs on the other — the whole force could be trapped. Yet, in an act of faith, the group stormed down the narrow road across which Alexander's army had once marched, and in less than an hour stepped triumphantly, if cautiously, out of the Panjsher Valley onto the heights of the Shamali Plain above Gulbahar.

Unsure if the government had been informed about the fighters' approach, Massoud dispatched Zahir and a party to make contact with some of the villages in the surrounding area. A couple of hours later, the young chieftain Zahir brought back mixed news. The good news was that the government troops at Bulaghain seemed unaware of the rebels' approach. The bad news was that the Shamali were lukewarm about the rebellion and unwilling to support it. Part of the reason for this was that many of the local residents had ties to the government garrison in the nearby town of Jabal as-Siraj. Massoud may not have

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[44] "3,000 Afghans Reported Executed," New York Times, 23 July 197. Doha QNA radio report, July 13, 1979, translated, from Index to the Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Reports, Middle East and Africa, July 18, 1979, No. JN131201.

been surprised by the response and obviously was pleased that the advance from Rukha had not been detected. He ordered the main group of fighters to march towards Bulaghain and attack.

The post fell with hardly a shot fired. Massoud then divided his men into three groups. The first, led by Gada and Aman, but accompanied by Massoud, would take up defensive positions to the east in a village called Darband. The second group, led by Aziz and Zabet Agha Gul, would establish positions on top of Kohe Sorkh, above Gulbahar, to prevent the town from being attacked from the west. So long as Gulbahar and the mouth of the valley remained liberated, the rebels could easily escape any number of ways back into the Panjsher from either Shotul or Darband. It was the final group, led by Mustafa, that would go on the attack.[45]

The target was the Salang Highway, the southern leg of Afghanistan's main north-south traffic artery running just to the west of Gulbahar. The road connected Kabul with the northern part of the country via a 1.7-mile tunnel through the Hindu Kush Mountains that had been completed by the Soviets in 1964.

During the militants' years in exile, as they studied previous guerrilla campaigns from China to France, someone — perhaps Massoud himself — seized upon the idea of the

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[45]Aziz interview, 12 October 1994, p. 1; Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 4.

Salang Route strategy. "Over and above their importance in a state's specific domestic and foreign policies," Mahnaz Ispahani writes in her 1989 study, Roads and Rivals, The Political Uses of Access in the Borderlands of Asia, "routes stubbornly retain a more substantial importance."[46] Perhaps knowing this, the militants developed the idea that if opposition forces could control at least a portion of the Panjsher Valley, they could launch attacks along the Salang and control the flow of goods down the highway into Kabul. And that, they realized, was enough to cripple the government.[47] For a communist regime dependent on supplies from the USSR, the Salang was an Achilles heel. Massoud's father, Dost Mohammad, soon to become one of the rebels' key strategists, had "specifically persisted on the importance of Salang."[48]

The plan was to start by taking out the bridges. Repair crews sent to work on the damaged bridges could then be attacked, requiring the dispatch of additional security forces who, in turn, could also be attacked. As Anwar had taught Massoud that spring, once a couple of repair crews and security teams had been fired on, it

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[46]Mahnaz Ispahani, Roads and Rivals: The Political Uses of Access in the Borderlands of Asia (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 232.

[47]Ispahani points out that Afghanistan's focus on "routes" as a key to its sovereignty went back to the nineteenth-century Amir Abdur Rahman, who believed "that the only solution to the threat of foreign encroachment on Afghan land lay in the denial of access," Roads and Rivals, p. 99.

[48]Agha Gul interview, 19 June 1994, p. 3.

would be extremely difficult for the government to find other workers willing to take their place. Eventually, the army would have to attempt a major operation, tying down large numbers of troops and assets and creating a significant embarrassment for themselves and their Soviet benefactors.

Accordingly, the third group commanded by Mustafa moved toward the strategic highway. The three initial targets were the Dehnaw and Padzhar bridges and the small Salang 'Alaqadari located up the road from Gulbahar. After the two bridges were demolished, with dynamite captured from the emerald mines, the rebels moved to attack the soldiers of the 'Alaqadari, who had abandoned their post and taken up defensive positions on heights just behind it. After besieging the group for several hours, the rebels convinced them to surrender, immediately releasing all but two officers who were brought to Shotul. "Treat the prisoners well," Massoud preached, "and it will encourage others to surrender."[49] It was another lesson he had learned from Anwar. After the destruction of the bridges and the capture of the 'Alaqadari, the rebels were able to operate in the Salang with impunity. For the Afghan government, the loss of the two bridges and the security post guarding the strategic road was a dramatic

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[49]Es-Haq interview, 16 September 1994, p. 2.

setback, the consequences of which were soon felt within the Defence Ministry.

Amin Takes Charge of Security

Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin, Taraki's American-educated deputy, appears to have begun jockeying for control of the country's security forces just at the time of the downing of the Dehnaw and Padzha bridges. The New York Times reported on June 24 that diplomats in Kabul believed that "Moscow has become disenchanted with Mr. Taraki's performance and would welcome his replacement, through a coup if necessary, by someone with more appeal among the Afghan people."[50] Several weeks later, during a July 21 meeting with the Soviet ambassador A. Puzanov, Amin "lamented that he does not have the authourity to run military affairs, and Taraki, who is concentrating the leadership in his own hands, cannot to a sufficient extent control the execution of his orders."[51] Several days after the Salang attacks, the Soviet Communist Party Central Committee had approved the deployment of an airborne battalion, "disguised in the uniform (overalls) of an aviation-technical maintenance team," to Bagram Airbase,

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[50]Robert Trumbull, "Insurgency Poses Growing Threat to Afghanistan's Pro-Soviet Rulers," New York Times, 24 June 1979.

[51]Transcript of conversation between USSR Ambassador Puzanov and Prime Minister Amin, 21 July 1979, from "The Soviet Union and Afghanistan 1978-1989: Documents from the Russian and East German Archives," in Cold War International History Project Electronic Bulletin, Issues 8-9, Winter 1997/1997, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C., p. 41.

eighteen kilometres south of Panjsher.[52] The covert battalion was presumably sent in part to ensure that the Panjsher Rebellion, occurring at a time of increasing anti-communist opposition, would not threaten the strategic airbase.

On July 27, Amin replaced Aslam Watanjar as minister of defence. The move illustrates the increasing fragility of the Communist government and Amin's eagerness to remove Watanjar, a career officer who had played a key role in both the 1973 and 1978 Communist coups. Two weeks earlier the New York Times had quoted an unnamed U.S. government official who warned that the Afghan army "could disintegrate" and "is losing a lot of men and equipment." The source added: "You could get more desertions. Soviet advisers can't inspire Afghan troops." The day after Amin's takeover, the State Department announced the withdrawal from the country of about 100 non-essential U.S. government employees and their families. By mid-August the U.S. Embassy in Kabul was reporting Soviet plots to depose Amin.[53]

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[52]Report on the Afghanistan situation presented by Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, Defence Minister D. Ustinov, KGB Director Yuri Andropov, and Boris Ponomarev, chief of the International Department at the Central Committee, to the CPSU Central Committee, 28 June 1979, from "The United States and Afghanistan 1978-1989: Documents from the Russian and East German Archives," p. 40. Alexander Lyakhovsky, a former major general in the Russian Army, notes that the recommendations made in this document were approved during the CC CPSU Politburo meeting of 28 June, 1979, in Resolution No. P, 156/XI. Lyakhovsky, The Tragedy and Valor of Afghan (Moscow: GPI Iskon, 1995), p. 76.

[53]David Binder, "U.S. Aides Say Afghanistan Army Is Crumbling Under Rebel Pressure," New York Times, 13 July 1979; Richard D. Lyons, "U.S. Will Withdraw Most of Staff From Afghanistan as Strife

Though it is difficult to quantify the exact role the Panjsher Rebellion had on the national security picture, a declassified U.S. Department of State cable dated July 30, 1979, concluded that the switch by Amin was made "in response to increasing insurgency operations," but added that the "cabinet reorganization is inadequate to pacify domestic political opposition." [54] Two weeks earlier, Kuwaiti radio reported that a spokesman for the Afghan rebels in Kuwait had said that the rebels "destroyed the two-kilometre (Salang) tunnel and halted traffic through it." Though the statement was inaccurate – only the bridges had been neutralized – the report correctly grasped the political significance of the events, reporting that the Salang highway "links the capital with the Soviet Union, and through it the Taraki government obtains military reinforcements from the Soviet Union."[55]

Another declassified cable, dated September 6, 1979 – seven weeks after the decision to deploy the Soviet parachute battalion in Bagram – cited four significant security developments outside of Kabul. The events listed, and the document's descriptions of them, are indicative of their perceived relative significance at the time. They included: 1) the fall of the government base

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Grows," New York Times, 24 July 1979; Urban, War in Afghanistan, pp. 36-37.

[54] Bruce J. Amstutz, confidential cable, U.S. Embassy, Kabul, to U.S. State Department, 30 July 1979, item number AF00601.

[55] Ar-Ra'y Al'Amm radio report, Kuwait, 17 July 1979, translated, from Index to the Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Reports, Middle East and Africa, 20 July 1979, No. LD191551.

in Asmar, Kunar Province, which had occurred in July and according to the document "was not directly attributable to the insurgents"; 2) the siege of several border towns in Paktia Province, including Khost, which were "surrounded by the insurgents and are dependent on air resupply"; 3) poor security in the second-largest city, Kandahar, where "sporadic shooting especially at night has been reported"; and 4) lastly, the Panjsher rebels' action, which is described somewhat nonchalantly:

> Fighting in the north is marked by the cutting of the Salang Pass Road. Two reinforced concrete spans on the southern approaches to the critical Salang Pass were dropped by insurgent action during the month, thereby causing transportation headaches for the regime, but also indicating a growing military sophistication on the part of the anti-regime forces…
>
> [text was apparently excised by issuing authourity]
>
> Required an expertise in demolitions which probably surpassed the skill normally associated with mountain villagers.[56]

Of the four developments, only the Salang attacks directly threatened the security of Kabul. Though this is not mentioned in the declassified portion of the report, the cable acknowledges both the strategic and qualitative significance of the bridges' destruction. An Agence France Press report on July 25 said that "After several setbacks last month, opponents of the regime have resumed their offensive throughout the country; notably in the

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[56]Bruce J. Amstutz, confidential cable, U.S. Embassy, Kabul, to U.S. State Department, 6 September 1979, No. 06697. 02 of 03 0612072, pp. 2-4.

Panjsher Valley, 60 kilometres north of Kabul, where the rebellion threatens to cut the strategic road linking the capital to northern Afghanistan and the Soviet Union."[57]

That these attacks, and the possibility of the Soviets being cut off from their client regime, were in the forefront of the minds of the senior Soviet officials when they presented their urgent report on June 28 seems beyond a doubt. For Massoud and the rebels, the fact that their attacks had made it onto the Central Committee's agenda may not have been a surprise.

The militants at this point had a number of good contacts within the crumbling Taraki regime and knew they could expect a full-fledged government response to their successful attacks. While Agence France Press just one month earlier had reported that, "Faced with the strengthening of the government's defensive power, few observers believe the Moslem rebellion can overthrow it," following the Salang attacks the news agency declared that "Western observers in Kabul say there is no doubt that the Soviet Union, which arms and supports the revolutionary regime, takes the chaotic situation into which the country is sliding very seriously."[58]

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[57] Jean-François le Mounier, "Reports Describe Fierce Fighting in Paktia Province," Agence France Press, 23 July 1979, from Index to the Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Reports, Middle East and Africa, 25 July 1979, No. OW231939.

[58] "Pushtu Rebels Inactive After Setbacks," Agence France Press, 24 June 1979, from Index to the Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Reports, Middle East and Africa, 26 June 1979, No. BK241611; Jean-François le Mounier, "Reports Describe Fierce Fighting in

Although the first attempts by the government to counterattack, probably from the nearby Jabal as-Siraj garrison, were not successful in relieving the 'Alaqadari in the Salang before it was captured, soon forces were sent in from the Kabul-based Central Corps.[59] "After nine days the government forces arrived from Kandahar and Mazar-i-Sharif," one fighter who was present recalled.[60]

As the fighting intensified in the first weeks of July and Amin sought to assert his control over the defence ministry, the rebels suffered a number of casualties. Despite this, a mobile rebel force of forty to fifty fighters under Zahir's command fought tenaciously over a twenty-four-hour period, briefly forcing the elite government troops to pull back.

A defensive line was thus established at the foot of the valley above the town of Jabal as-Siraj, and the rebels retired to Shotul to plan their next move. Fearing the collapse of his ten-kilometre defensive line north and west of the mouth of the Panjsher, Massoud maintained a vigorous routine in an attempt to personally encourage the various groups of fighters who were increasingly short of food and suffering from dysentery.[61]

Paktia Province," Agence France Press, 23 July 1979, from Index to the Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Reports, Middle East and Africa, 25 July 1979, No. OW231939.

[59]Urban, War in Afghanistan, p. 37.

[60]Abdul Hai interview, 6 October 1994, p. 6.

[61]Ibid., p. 5.

Reports of the Salang campaign soon filtered back to Pakistan. When Gulbuddin heard of one of Massoud's treks – beginning in Salang in the morning, continuing almost all day to Darband, and including a return to Shotul before ending in Salang twenty-odd hours later – he argued that such a feat was impossible.[62] Such was the dichotomy that developed between the actions of ISI's surrogate Gulbuddin and Massoud, literally from the first days of the war. "Pakistan all but forced the CIA to back [Hekmatyar and its] favourites," a U.S. official responsible for covert aid would later complain.[63] The ISI's eagerness to discredit the Persian rebels, perhaps augmented by the rebels' presence in the field and inability to participate in the Pakistani-based discussions, was to greatly skew the perceptions of the conflict among Western and other observers as they attempted to make sense of the burgeoning Afghan insurgency.

With the two bridges down and the 'Alaqadari captured, the rebels' strength was the greatest it had been since the rebellion began. They controlled an area some one hundred miles long and in places as much as

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[62]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994 p. 5. The trek from Salang, only eight kilometres west of Gulbahar, easily took the better part of a day since one had to travel back and forth through the mountains, up the narrows at Dalong Sang gorge, across to the east ridge of Shotul and down into the small gorge, and back up the other side – perhaps more than ten kilometres in vertical feet.

[63]George Crile, Charlie Wilson's War (New York: Grove Press, 2003), p. 195.

twenty miles across, and more importantly, they had closed Highway 1, briefly cutting off Kabul from northern Afghanistan.[64] Less than three months after Massoud had returned to Afghanistan, he had risen to become the most influential opposition leader in the country. While in 1994 Massoud modestly described the Salang Strategy as a tactical step, "aimed at cutting off reinforcement and supply of Salang 'Alaqadari," he realized very well that his actions in the late summer of 1979 had had a profound impact on the government, though at the time he probably had no way of knowing that they had reverberated directly to the halls of the Kremlin in Moscow.[65]

By July it was widely known that General Aleksei Yepishev, who had played a key role in the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, was in Kabul.[66] In early July, Massoud, with a sense that the government was growing desperate, received an urgent message in Darban from a trusted Paryani fighter in the Salang, informing him of the arrival of a senior colonel of the security ministry in the area above Jabal as-Siraj. The colonel was propagandizing against Massoud and Ahmad Jan and offering

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[64]According to Ghafur, the highway was blocked for seven days before government forces reopened it, Ghafour interview, 24 February 1995, p. 2.

[65]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 4.

[66]An anonymous writer, described by the New York Times as an Afghan living in the U.S., wrote in an op-ed piece: "Soviet influence is also apparent in large-scale military aid, in the presence of 4,000 to 6,000 Russian advisers and in the extended visits by Gen. Aleksei A. Yepishev, head of the Political Directorate of the Soviet armed forces." "The Afghans See Red," New York Times, 26 July 1979.

to feed the hungry rebels. "Why are you killing yourselves for the sake of Massoud, Pahlawan Ahmad Jan and Tarjuman Abdul Haq, while they are leading a luxurious life and eating better than you? You have nothing to eat and all of you have dysentery," the colonel told the fighters over a loudspeaker from a post in the heights above Jabal as-Siraj.[67]

Almost until that moment, despite the hardships faced by the rebels on the front lines, the rebellion's progress had far surpassed the years of planning and expectation that had led up to it. But upon reading the note, Massoud immediately recognized the intensification in the government's tactics that he must have feared. He hastily departed for the town, fearing the rural, upland rebels' inability to resist the political pressures of the disingenuously solicitous communist agent. He knew that he would have to meet the new challenge head-on.

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[67]Abdul Hai interview, 6 October 1994, p. 6.

Chapter 6, On the Defensive, August-October 1979.

The Commander's Injury

Massoud arrived at the rebel base in Kohe Sorkh before dark. Realizing that the Mujahedins' morale was broken following several days of heavy fighting, and in the wake of the colonel's anti-rebel propaganda campaign, he quickly organized a counter-offensive, which pushed the government forces back and captured several of their positions.[1]

This success, however, was hardly conclusive. The next morning, as Massoud and Abdul Ghafur, the local commander, were observing the terrain, previously unseen government positions that were far closer than the rebels expected opened fire from close range. Realizing that they were vulnerable, Massoud, who appears to have been caught off guard, dispatched a fighter for hand grenades.

Massoud was right to be concerned, as shortly thereafter concentrated fire blasted apart piled stones on his side of the bunker, forcing the commander to shift to Ghafur's more heavily fortified side of the post. At this point, Massoud, who was unarmed, turned to Ghafur and asked, "What shall we do?" Ghafur, who had suffered some minor facial wounds from shrapnel or rock shards thrown up

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[1] Ghafur interview, 24 February 1995, p. 3; Abdul Hai interview, 6 October 1994, pp. 6-8.

by the blast, suggested that Massoud withdraw up the slope behind them.[2]

Although Ghafur could not see the enemy position, he continued firing intermittently as Massoud made his way up the hill. Most of the commander's ascent was shielded from the enemy gunners, but "when he was moving along the hilltop," Ghafur recalled, "he was exposed." Ghafur saw bullets hitting the mountainside some one hundred metres above him, where Massoud had stopped. There followed a pause during which Ghafur thought that Massoud was just catching his breath. Then, scanning the heights again, he saw Massoud gesturing to him. Even at a distance, Ghafur realized from the commander's movements that he was in trouble.[3] He broke into a sprint up the steep bank.

When Ghafur reached Massoud's position, he saw that the commander was wounded in his upper thigh. "Be careful not to fall into the enemy's hands," the commander told him. Then he added, "You have to do your best to evacuate me from here."[4]

Having paused for only about a minute and a half, Ghafur, who had grown up carrying game through the mountains, picked up the taller man and continued up the bank towards the rebels' main position. Some thirty

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[2] Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 8; Ghafur interview, 24 February 1995, p. 4.
[3] Ghafur interviews, 7 April 1995, p. 2; 13 March 1995, p. 1; 24 February 1995, p. 4.
[4] Ghafur interviews, 13 March 1995, p. 1; 24 February 1995, p. 4.

minutes later they arrived at the base held by Haji Matin's son Ibrihim, who was also Ghafur's kinsman, and about thirty other men.[5]

"Massoud calmly told the men to remain in their positions and that he would send me back after taking him. However, they were anxious," Ghafur recalled. "Massoud said he would soon recover and be at their service." The commander was still lucid and instructed the men "to strengthen their positions."[6] Ghafur again put Massoud on his back, they said good-bye, and set out for Shotul, accompanied by an elderly man from Paryan.

Outside of Shotul, Massoud suggested that Ghafur set him down in the shade of an almond tree. The commander propped his head up on a rock and said he would stay with the old man who had travelled with them from Ibrihim's base, while Ghafur continued on to the village to find a doctor.

Upon reaching Shotul, the exhausted Ghafur met Agha Gul, who happened to be in the village. Agha Gul immediately took charge of the situation, leading a doctor and some men carrying a stretcher toward the place where Massoud had been left. Ghafur himself, after catching his breath, departed for Dalong Sang to summon reinforcements.[7]

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[5] Ghafur interview, 7 April 1995, p. 2.
[6] Ibid., p. 3; 24 February 1995, p. 5.
[7] Ghafur remembered Abdul Woodood and Nazar Mohammad being there when he arrived, Ibid., p. 3.

An hour later Agha Gul found Massoud lying under the almond tree, alert and in good humour. It was about ten in the morning, some four hours since he had been shot. Although Agha Gul must have been shocked at the sight of Massoud's wound, even more disturbing would have been the thought of the effect that the commander's injury would have on the front. The experienced security officer knew that, some two weeks since the first clash with government forces in the Salang, the rebels' position was precarious. With the chief out of action, there was a real danger of a reversal in their fortune.

This fear was not that exaggerated. Having almost perished on the road, Massoud was given superficial treatment at a local clinic before being taken to the house of his sister and brother-in-law, Ghaus, in his native village of Janaglak. There he lay for a couple of days, feverish and falling in and out of consciousness, before he began to regain his strength.

Recovery

Within a day or two of his recovery, Massoud, while still bed-ridden, resumed his operational activities. A field telephone was set up in his room and he began taking reports from the front, many of them negative, scrawling

notes with a pen while he spoke.[8] As word of his injury leaked out, scores of well-wishers came to visit. One day shortly after his arrival, his sister served lunch to seventy-two people.[9] Five days after his injury, Massoud was already able to drive down near the front line where Jagran Ghaus, Mustafa and many others were attempting, with increasing desperation, to hold back a government advance into the valley.

The Front at Feraj

Three days earlier, perhaps two days after Massoud's injury, the front in Kohe Sorkh above Gulbahar had collapsed. The government forces counterattacked from the Shotul mountains and from the Gulbahar Road, killing a few insurgents and wounding others. Aziz recalled that after he was evacuated to 'Anabah, the fighting became very fierce.

> A number of brothers remained in Gulbahar along with Rahmi Khoda. At night the government forces surrounded them. With suffering and difficulties they were able to retreat from Gulbahar and the Darband area.[10]

Mustafa at this time assumed general command of the defence of the valley at Dalong Sang. Although he appears to have had less rapport than Massoud had with certain Dasht-i-Rewati front-line forces, the commander later

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[8] Mrs. M. Ghaus interview, 11 April 1995, p. 1.
[9] Ibid., p. 1.
[10] Aziz interview, 10 December 1994, p. 2.

verified the central role played at this time by his longtime deputy.[11] For his part, Ghaus, functioning as the senior headquarters officer and having received a report on the deteriorating situation at Dalong Sang and "the possibility of the defeat of the front," ordered the establishment of a second line of defence. He dispatched Qayyoum, a reliable local leader, to ask representatives of Dada Khiel and Sata (regions of Bazarak) to immediately send new recruits to the fighting zone. As Qayyoum recalled, "Each region had its own representatives and clergy and these representatives were duty-bound to recruit people. People were sending in groups for ten days, and after ten days the next group was occupying the position of the previous group."[12]

Qayyoum and Ghaus arrived at the Bazarak Bridge to find Bashi Sa'duddin, khan of Bazarak, Haji Sayfuddine and thirty or so volunteers from Mala, Manjahor and Parande ready to march to Dalong Sang. After two months of fighting in the Panjsher, few of the men had really distinguished themselves as soldiers, so Sa'duddin, the tall, energetic chief with a booming voice, was a natural choice to lead the group. He had worked in the 1970s as a foreman on the construction of the Salang-Mazar-i-Sharif Highway and was an experienced organizer of men.[13]

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[11]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 6.
[12]Qayyoum interview, 17 July 1995, pp. 2-3.
[13]Ibid., pp. 2-3.

Sa'duddin's group had made it only as far as Rukha that morning when they started encountering rebels heading up the valley, having quit the fight. The Bazarakis, natives of Massoud's town, may have felt a particular obligation to press on, but along the way some of the men deserted and the morale of the rest was depleting rapidly. About five miles from Dalong Sang, they saw government forces in the distance advancing up the road towards them. Taking cover behind rocks in the wide-open area, the rebels opened fire from several hundred metres, only to realize after some time that their chances of holding the enemy on the open ground were slim. They withdrew to Feraj, about three kilometres back up the valley.

Mustafa arrived in Feraj probably that same afternoon with a number of other fighters, having withdrawn from Dalong Sang through the mountains. He quickly took charge and deployed Sa'duddin and the Bazarakis in positions on the southeast side of the road. "Mujahedins were divided in different groups," Qayyoum explained. "Each group was led by its representative such as Tarjuman Abdul Haq, Commander Aman, Haji Habib, and Haji Sa'duddin."[14] For the next three or four days the front at Feraj held out in the face of intermittent government shelling, as Mustafa and the other leaders rallied the men to hold their ground.

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[14]Qayyoum interview, 15 April 1995, p. 1.

On the fourth or fifth day of fighting, following the re-suturing of his wound, Massoud, aided by a walking stick, visited the front.[15] This encouraged the rebels, though the fact that they had been pushed so far back in the previous week and were now fighting inside the valley, in the face of an intensifying challenge, seems to have rapidly drained morale. "The news of defeat on the Salang and Shotul fronts spread in the village," Ayoub recalled. "Mujahedin forces retreated up to 'Anabah and Rukha."[16]

With the government firmly entrenched on the valley's southern approach, the defeat of the rebellion in the Pa'een appeared imminent. Chaos developed in Rukha where the prisoners, never evacuated as Ghaus had ordered, overpowered one of the rebel leaders, Mohammad Arab. The important Balai fighter was not seen for six days.[17] For experienced military men such as Ghaus and Agha Gul, the desperation of the situation was becoming clear.

Decision to Flee Bazarak

Massoud followed the news of the stand at Feraj very closely. As the defence began collapsing (probably on the sixth or seventh day after he was wounded), he decided, after consulting his father and Ghaus, to evacuate Jangalak with their families for the safety of the Bala.

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[15]Mrs. M. Ghaus interview, 11 April 1995, p. 2.
[16]Ayoub interview, May 1995, p. 12.
[17]Ibid., p. 12.

The men did not know how quickly the government forces were advancing, and Ahmad Jan and almost all of the militants' other supporters had already fled Rukha. The families packed a few possessions into a car and prepared to bid farewell to the village and the peaceful life that they had enjoyed there for many generations. Still injured, Massoud reluctantly took a place in the car.

Near the village of Malaspa, several hundred metres from Bazarak, the group was stopped by a roadblock manned by some of Massoud's kinsmen, including a well-known Communist. Though stopping short of trying to seize the rebel chief, the armed men resolutely refused to let the family pass. The bodyguards accompanying Massoud wanted to open the road by threat of force, but Massoud ordered them not to fire their weapons.[18] Even for Massoud, clan bonds took precedence over the success of the rebellion. With little choice, the family returned to Rhaus's house.

"When we returned back home, the government forces had reached up to Rukha and Khaniz," Mrs. Ghaus recalled. "Enough time had elapsed, and they were definitely able to reach Bazarak."[19] It was then decided that Ghaus and Dost Mohammad would lead the women overland to Zenay. While the prospect of trekking overnight in the high mountains with women and children in late summer was daunting, it

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[18]Mrs. M. Ghaus interview, 20 August 1995, p. 7; Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 3 March 1995, p. 1.
[19]Ibid., p. 8.

was a better option than declaring war on their kinsman. The family bid an emotional farewell as they left Massoud and several of his men in the cut-off location and began the march into the mountains.

Over the field phone Massoud succeeded in getting a message to Haji Zahir in Rukha, where Communist sympathizers were attempting to seize control ahead of the government advance. Zahir arrived in Jangalak three to four hours after Massoud's first attempt to leave the village. He forced the stunned commander into his car and drove to the roadblock. Zahir, who had distinguished himself on the front lines during the rebellion, shot out of the vehicle and ordered the road cleared. Faced with the resolve of the respected Balai leader and his well-armed men, the Jangalakis acceded and the party passed through the roadblock and continued up the valley.[20]

The Government's Advance Into the Bala

That night, Massoud dined at the home of Zahir's uncle, Jalaluddin, the *malik* or mayor of Safid Chihr. As the government's representative and the most important khan in the largest Balai town, Jalaluddin occupied a position of unique importance in the valley and his support when Massoud had first returned from Pakistan had been critical in getting the rebellion started.

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[20]Haji Zahir interview, 6 April 1995, p. 1.

Now that the front had collapsed, Massoud needed to sell his concept of challenging the government all over again. He realized that Jalaluddin was in a difficult position: while the *malik* was impressed with Massoud and Zahir's idealism, at the same time he had to confront the possibility that government forces might soon be occupying his town. In addition, Jalaluddin's brother, Gulestan Khan, was continuing to propagandize against Massoud, with whom he appears to have been developing a rivalry. For Massoud, after being shot, seeing the rebellion crumble, and leaving his family to escape over the mountains, the meeting that night became in many ways the biggest challenge in what had already proved to be a difficult week.

Panjsheris rarely hold serious discussions during dinner and thus Massoud and Jalaluddin probably did not discuss these issues until after the meal was finished. Massoud began the meeting with what was becoming his catch-phrase for such situations: "What should we do?"

The question was discussed at length. "I told him I was afraid to keep him here and advised him that it was better for him to leave for Dasht-i-Rewat or Paryan," Zahir recalled. Eventually it was decided that Zahir and his family would accompany Massoud to Paryan while Jalaluddin, having played little public part in the rebellion, would remain in Safid Chihr. Zahir remembered

that Massoud said "that he would go only if I would follow him with my family to Paryan."[21]

The rebel leader was apparently anxious about going into exile in the upper Bala, and felt that he would be safer if he were in the company of the respected Balai fighter who already that night had stared down Massoud's own kinsmen. Perhaps, too, the prospect of his family seeking refuge there seemed less socially daunting if another prominent Balai family accompanied them. Other issues may have been addressed: speculation about the situation in Rukha, an accounting of the rebel forces, and the disturbing increase in anti-rebellion sentiments in the valley, all of which had reached a crisis point that day.

The Front

Within three or four days of Massoud's arrival in Paryan, government forces had completely secured the Pa'een.[22] With the crumbling of the front in the lower valley came resentment towards the fighters in the upper valley. Still, in its first days the rebellion had won a great deal of support, particularly in Dasht-i-Rewat and Paryan, and it was in those two highland areas that Massoud now focused his attention. Nationally, the situation remained promising. In a New York Times report of August 2, 1979,

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[21] Ibid., pp. 1-2.
[22] Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 5 April 1995, p. 1.

Western and Muslim diplomats characterized Soviet involvement in Afghanistan as "a last-ditch attempt to find a political solution to the nine-month-old civil war that has left the Government in full control of only 25 percent of the country."[23]

Shortly after his return to Safid Chihr, Massoud met with Ahmad Jan. "You have to blow up the Sha'bah Bridge," he told the wrestler, "otherwise they'll capture the upper part of the valley." At the time, Ahmad Jan's fighting abilities were considered comparable to those of top fighters such as Aziz and Gada,[24] but he was still an odd choice to lead such an important operation. The former Olympian had played a negligible role in the rebellion fighting over the previous two months, spending most of his time holding court in Rukha like a traditional Afghan administrator, while Mustafa, Aziz, Gada and Zahir had spent much of their time on the front lines.

In addition to Ahmad Jan's apparent aversion to combat, there were other signs - such as his refusal to obey Rhaus' request to transfer the prisoners the previous week - that his commitment to the rebellion was waning. But Massoud desperately needed to energize the movement and again pinned his hopes on the local celebrity. The commander probably believed that if Ahmad Jan succeeded in

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[23] "Moscow Said to Urge Shaky Afghan Regime to Broaden Its Base," New York Times, 2 August 1979.

[24] Both would rise to the highest levels in the resistance hierarchy.

destroying the bridge, the people in Safid Chihr, the main beneficiaries of the planned action, would be inspired to rejoin the rebellion.

One morning during the second or third week of September 1979, Ahmad Jan left Safid Chihr with a small contingent to blast the bridge at Sha'bah. He must have realized that if the government crossed the bridge and moved into the Bala, the rebellion would be in grave peril. Though Massoud seems already to have been contemplating a plan to reorganize his forces in Paryan, if cut off from Dasht-i-Rewat and Safid Chihr the continued support from men like Zahir and Matin would be unlikely. Fearing for the success of the operation, Massoud decided to go to the forward rebel town himself.[25]

Just before reaching Sha'bah the men suddenly heard the sound of heavy vehicles. Looking down the road they could see three tanks rounding a bend some two to three hundred metres away. As they took shelter on the far side of a mud wall, Massoud realized that Ahmad Jan and his group had failed in their mission to blow up the bridge. Fortunately for Massoud, the tanks continued on their way, without realizing that they had just missed one of the most wanted men in the country.[26]

Having had a narrow escape, Massoud and his party took to the mountains to avoid the valley road, and after

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[25]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 3 March 1995, p. 2.
[26]Ibid., pp. 1-2.

a harsh journey of several days reached Chai-a-hoo in Dasht-i-Rewat, where Massoud hoped to find a warm welcome from his friend Haji Matin.

The Coming of the Nuristanis

For about the next twenty days Massoud remained encamped in a small cave above Dasht-i-Rewat at Bamwarder, as he focused on his recovery. Several times he ventured down to spy on the government's tanks at Grenju and make clandestine visits to Matin's house in Dahane Rewat, but generally he stayed close to his cave-headquarters. With Safid Chihr and Dasht-i-Rewat now occupied by the government, Paryan — the last group of villages in the upper Bala, inaccessible by the road — became the rebels' primary operating zone.[27] As word spread up and down the valley, the group in Bamwarder soon grew from about twenty men to about sixty. During this time a number of key supporters of the rebellion trickled in from the Salang and Ghorband, as the people of Paryan began to play a central role in the rebellion.[28]

Two or three days after arriving in the upper valley, Massoud sent a message to Mawlawi Abdul Razzaq in Nuristan asking him to send armed men, with a view to using the

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[27]Mistary Shah Nawaz interview, 17 July 1995, p. 8.
[28]Ibid., p. 14.

still-energized Nuristani rebels to reignite the Panjsher front.[29]

Approximately twenty-five days after Massoud arrived in Bamwarder from Sha'bah, an army of Nuristanis arrived in the Paryani village of Shari Bland with a DShK heavy machine gun. For a year prior to Massoud's arrival, the people of Shari Bland had had relations with the Nuristanis; one of the Paryani khans, Fazel Ahmad, had bought a Kalashnikov from them. In all, several hundred fighters arrived, some of them coming via Chamar and others via Waryaj directly to Deh Paryan.[30] Abdul Razzaq and Abdul Haliem, their military commander, and the group met Massoud in Deh Paryan as the leaders began to make a plan of attack.[31]

Massoud established a base there and set about arranging for food to be collected for the guest fighters. The group stayed for two nights in Deh Paryan before moving down the valley via Dasht-i-Rewat towards the Shamaruq, where the government had a base between Zenay and Peshawar that they hoped to recapture. The Nuristanis were in high spirits and eager for a fight, and before long the battle was joined.

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[29]The communications were conveyed "through the inhabitants of Paryan." The Mawlawi of Paryan seems to have also had some role in the discussion that followed. See Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 5 April 1995.

[30]Fazel Ahmad interview, 11 June 1995, pp. 4, 6.

[31]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 3 March 1995, p. 4.

"We were divided in four groups," Shah Nawaz later recalled. "The first group was assigned to the Sha'bah Bridge, the second to Zenay, the third and the fourth on top of mountains over Shamaruq. I belonged to the Shamaruq group. We left early in the morning with a group of one hundred and fifty men, and the group's commander was a Nuristani."[32] Massoud provided a detailed account of the journey of one of the Shamaruq groups that he accompanied. It is highly informative in regard to both the complexity and challenges of mountain warfare and the remarkable stamina, and even sense of humour, that enabled Massoud to succeed under trying conditions.

> We moved along the mountain skirt, in order to not disclose our location to other people. We came along the mountain skirt from Safid Chihr to Khinj. Then we arrived near Peshghour. We went there through some areas heading for a big gulch. When we arrived the sun had set and was also slightly raining. I asked who our guide was. They replied that Mawlawi Saheb Daoud is the guide. Mawlawi Saheb Daoud started to show us the way. We didn't arrive to the gulch. We were farther down from it.
>
> Mawlawi Saheb Daoud, instead of turning a little bit, he went up to the mountain and we are continuing to walk on that mountain. We were frequently asking, "Oh Mawlawi Saheb, where is the place?" He was replying that, "I have seen this place, you follow me." Finally it was midnight and he brought us on the top of a strange mountain. From there we got down and brought us to the extreme end of the Peshghour mountain. We were together with six hundred Nuristanis on the top of the mountain. It was nighttime, cold and rainy.
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> In the morning we had marched from Safid Chihr and at midnight we were on the top of the mountain. Each and

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[32]Mistary Shah Nawaz interview, 17 July 1995, p. 17.

every Nuristani was calling Mawlawi Saheb Daoud a Communist and infidel. Mawlawi Saheb had hidden himself behind us. Finally we arrived in a village where a few people were living. They found there a room. My problem was that I was walking with a lame leg. I fell down there utterly unconscious. We spent the night there and in the morning we divided our people into groups and sent them here and there.

We came down again in the Peshghour village in the morning. In climbing up and coming down from the mountain, my right leg which had stiffness, became all right. I asked the Almighty God to not trouble Muslims. I walked many times along the skirt of Peshghour mountain with my injured leg. I visited many positions there till I decided on placing the heavy weapons, the Dashaka, the cannon and the anti-tank weapons. Here I was looking for a tire to place in it dynamite and detonators. Then burn it and leave it to be rolled from the top of the mountain inside the government division and exploding there. We had dynamite and detonators, but were not able to find a tire. Then we prepared big boulders and tried to roll them inside the government division but when we released the boulders they didn't go down to the division and they stopped halfway.[33]

With the men disoriented, poorly armed, and in increasingly poor morale, Massoud dispatched a group under two Dasht-i-Rewatis, Aman and Gada, to Bazarak to try and sever the road there. "The enemy arrived and they attacked a number of Panjsheri guys by heavy shelling of cannons. There a number of the guys were killed." Despite the losses, the rebels appear to have briefly "halted the enemy forces."[34] The engagement, which took place at the foot of the Narma Mountains, resulted in the destruction of a government Jeep. Eventually, however, a

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[33]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 5 April 1995, pp. 2-3.
[34]Ibid., p. 4; Ayoub interview, May 1995, p. 13.

government tank broke through the rebel cordon and continued on towards Puli Sha'bah. A second group of Nuristanis lying in wait then attempted to cut the government off at Sha'bahSha'bah Bridge. Heavy fighting ensued in this second battle. Massoud recorded that a number of Nuristanis "fought up to the last and about eight of them were killed and we buried them next to Puli Sha'bah beside the road."[35] Part of the problem for the rebels, according to Shah Nawaz, was government informants in Sha'bah:

> A number of local people guided the enemy tanks and informed them about the Nuristani position on Sha'bah Bridge. They caused casualties to the Nuristanis there and also put our positions under fire. We did not have any anti-tank weapons and the whole Nuristani group did not have more than four or five Kalashnikovs.[36]

The failure of this hard-fought second engagement appears to have demoralized the remaining Nuristani fighters for whom mere survival was quickly becoming the main concern.

In the two days that the fighters were in Shamaruq, Massoud's supply chief, a young mullah from Sha'bah named Fahim, "was nearly killed two times by the Nuristanis." Unable to gather more significant sustenance, the commander recalled, Fahim (who would later become minister of defence) "had given bread in pieces to the Nuristanis.

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[35]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 5 April 1995, p. 4. The place, which is called "the martyred place," was an example of the popular mysticism practiced by Massoud. As he would later recount, "People have seen time and again that light was flaring up from that region to the sky during the night."

[36]Mistary Shah Nawaz interview, 17 July 1995, p. 17.

They became angry with Fahim and told him, 'We are not chickens, why are you giving us the bread in pieces?'" Accusing the highly intelligent and devout cleric of being a "Khalqi-Communist," guns were pointed at him until Massoud "arrived and rescued him."[37] On a separate occasion, he was similarly cornered by angry Nuristanis when Ghaus, always urbane and self-confident, arrived and freed the young cleric. The attacks on Massoud's representative demonstrated the low morale that had overtaken the Nuristani fighters within just a few days of their arrival.

Deeply alarmed by this setback, Massoud and his lieutenants spent two full days reviewing the situation and the rebels' remaining options. "They [the Nuristanis] said they were not properly guided by the locals, and they were unfamiliar with the terrain. Therefore, they were defeated and lost their men," Fazel Ahmad, Massoud's key ally in Paryan, remembered.[38]

"We didn't know what to do," Massoud recalled. "One of our men proposed to go to Peshawar."[39] Only a few dozen supporters remained camped in the furthest reaches of the valley following the last defeat. Massoud was still debilitated from his wound, winter was approaching, and the majority of the population in both the Pa'een and the

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[37]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 5 April 1995, p. 4.
[38]Fazel Ahmad interview, 11 June 1995, p. 9.
[39]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 3 March 1995, p. 4.

Bala - having been bombed and having had their access to the main road cut off - were now opposed to the rebellion. The ambitious venture, which the militants had dreamed of for so long, appeared destined to fail.

A U.S. Embassy cable, of 6 September 1979, largely confirmed this view. It concluded:

> The situation around the Salang is relatively calm. The rugged and sparsely-populated Panjshir Valley a few miles east of the Salang Pass also erupted in violence during August [and July], but the regime apparently has contented itself with punitive air strikes against the valley's inhabitants, as well as with a blockade at the valley's mouth in order to prevent any insurgent action against the nearby Bagram Air Base, the most vital military air field in the country.

On the same day, the New York Times reported that "Near the [air] field is the Panjsher Valley, where one rebel group has been dug in for three months, reportedly attacking Government forces with great success."[40]

The American Charge d'Affaires, who had signed the September 6 cable mentioning the calm in the Panjsher, had no way of knowing that in the upper reaches of the valley on the night before the Nuristanis departed, the khans of Paryan had made a dramatic decision. Led, in particular, by the persuasive Fazel Ahmad, the khans' agreement, at a dire hour, would begin to shift the balance of power back

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[40]Bruce J. Amstutz, confidential cable, U.S. Embassy, Kabul, to U.S. State Department, 6 September 1979, No. 06697, Section 02 of 03 0612072, p. 3. From National Security Archive collection, Afghanistan: The Making of U.S. Policy, 1973-1990. Michael T. Kaufman, "Soviet Role in Afghan Clash Shows Signs of Toughening," New York Times, September 6, 1979.

against the Communists and thrust the Panjsher Rebellion into a new phase of development.

Chapter 7, From a Rebellion to a Guerrilla Front: Rejection, Oaths and the Return to Bazarak, November-December 10, 1979.

Although the full implications of the most recent defeat ten days earlier were still unclear, Massoud and his supporters knew that with government forces on the outskirts of Dasht-i-Rewat, the situation was bad. Many of the men, including Matin, Zahir and others, had been present at the militants' arrival the previous summer and all had been active supporters of the rebellion. If the army advanced into Paryan, most of them would have to flee for their lives. They had come to Fazel Ahmad's house to hear what Massoud had to say; they were hoping for some reassurance. Yet when the meeting finally started, the commander's words offered little encouragement.

The Nuristanis "didn't fight well and lost their spirit when two or three of them were killed," Massoud said. "I am going to take my family to 'Nuristan' and I want you to give me time for a few days. I will not leave the front. I will shed my blood or bring victory to the front." He went on: "I will come back and we can build a new front." Physically and emotionally, Massoud was worn out from the campaigns and believed that a few weeks in "Nuristan" would give him the strength he needed to build a true guerrilla front. Privately, some of the men feared

that the affluent Massoud would use the opportunity to return to Pakistan.[1]

Massoud's suggestion that he would quit the Panjsher was thus met with a cool response, and the meeting continued with opinions ranging from open hostility, especially on the part of the Safid Chihris and Dasht-i-Rewatis, many of whom had already fled their homes, to the contrite remorse of men like Fazel Ahmad, who apparently said little. The men, all upstanding, law-abiding citizens, were perhaps in shock at the realization that they were now fugitives and at the thought of what that meant for them both individually and collectively.

Finally, at around 21.00 hours, Fazel Ahmad made a move. A maternal cousin of Matin's, he had played the leading role in getting the Paryanis to support the rebellion. Now, watching it unravel, he felt bound to try to do something. Discreetly, he got the attention of seven of the other most important Paryani khans and elders and directed them to the upstairs room of his nephew's adjacent house, where he carefully laid out his plan for saving the rebellion. With apparently little discussion, the men concurred. Perhaps it was a question of honour:

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[1] Fazel Ahmad interviews, 1 May 1995, pp. 16-17; 11 June 1995, pp. 10, 12. At the height of the civil war in 1995, Fazel Ahmad cited Massoud's desire to travel to "Nuristan," but Massoud almost certainly envisioned returning to Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province, where he had spent much of the previous five years and where Rabbani and other close confidants maintained safe houses in the provincial centre of Peshawar.

Ahmad had gotten them into the situation, and they would give him a chance to try and solve the problem.

Once confident of his peers' support, Ahmad brought Massoud into the meeting and told him of the evolving consensus: the Paryanis would support the front but would not allow Massoud or his family to leave. "We asked him to wait until the spring and then we'll see, and pledged that we all from 7 to 70 years old are ready to stand with him." The Paryanis' pledge was based on their fear of a government advance. "It was a matter of concern for us that the government might attack and Massoud would not be there to organize and lead the fighters."[2]

In part, the statement demonstrates, even at this early stage, the almost mystical value that the highlanders placed on Massoud's leadership. The men saw the presence of Dost Mohammad and his family as a control factor: If Massoud's family were part of the community, it might encourage him to be more cautious than if he did not have a personal stake in the villages' security.[3]

Although "not upset" by the Paryanis' order, Massoud appears to have had some reservations about the arrangement and the discussions continued at length. Massoud "wanted to leave with the Nuristani malawis," and

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[2] Fazel Ahmad interview, 11 June 1995, pp. 12-13.

[3] Dost Mohammad seems to have welcomed this idea, and would spend the next three winters in Paryan, long after his obligation to do so had expired.

made that desire known to the eight leaders.[4] Ahmad knew that the twenty villages of Paryan at the intersection of Badakhshan, Nuristan and the Panjsher were vulnerable from different directions, and he was instinctively more of a pragmatist than his cousin Matin.

While he admired Massoud and the cause of the rebellion, Ahmad was also committed to protecting his, and the other seven chiefs', territory, and had specifically not invited Matin and the others from already occupied towns. In this way, Ahmad successfully bolstered the position of the Paryanis, whose territory the rebels were relying upon. In so doing, he also put himself in the position of becoming both the local leader of the rebellion and the *de facto* chief of the eight leaders, committed to the best interests of Paryan. Years later Ahmad acknowledged playing such a role in the pivotal meeting, saying, "Since the meeting was in my [kinsman's] house maybe I talked more than the others."

In resigning himself to staying in Paryan, Massoud's first task was to communicate to Ahmad and the other chiefs the necessity of moving from conventional war to guerilla warfare. "If you are ready to provide me men, I will start guerrilla war," he said. "Otherwise, we cannot do anything."[5] This was more than a tactical shift. It

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[4] Fazel Ahmad interview, 11 June 1995, p. 11.
[5] Ibid., pp. 11, 13.

represented an overall transformation in Massoud's strategic outlook. As he later explained:

> A small, trained and disciplined group is far better than a big one. I understand that I had been wrong the last time, and all the activities carried out later in the Panjsher and in the north were the result of the thought that surfaced after the defeat.... We decided to find a number of dedicated and decisive people to take the oath that they will never lay down arms unless Afghanistan is liberated. We pledged to devote our lives and wealth.[6]

After Massoud had just spent the majority of the evening trying to make the case for his temporary return to Pakistan, the men's firm rejection may well have been just what he was hoping for. If Ahmad would now join Matin and the other Dasht-i-Rewatis in taking financial responsibility for the movement, it would enable Massoud, as their contractor, to start building a true guerrilla front. In many ways it was the same strategy that he and Ghaus had planned to employ when they first returned to the valley the previous summer: let men like Matin and Ahmad Jan be the visible leaders of the rebellion while the militants worked in the background. This approach had worked quite well until the movement spilled into the Pa'een, Darband and Salang at such a rapid pace that it forced Massoud and the other former exiles to take direct charge of military affairs.

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[6] Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, pp. 23-24.

With the exception of a few individuals like Mohammad Gada and Zahir, who had been able to make quickly the transformation from tribal leaders to military commanders, the role of the khans had progressively been marginalized during the rebellion, leaving Massoud, Ghaus and Mustafa visibly running the movement. With Fazel Ahmad stepping forward with the other Paryani chiefs, Massoud must have felt encouraged: surely he had a better chance of recapturing the valley with these men than he did if he returned to Nuristan or Peshawar and waited until the following spring.[7]

No sooner had Massoud gained the support of the Paryanis than he assembled his men and told them of his intention to launch a sustained guerrilla programme. To begin, he would need to find a small number of capable, committed recruits. They should be unmarried, of good mind, and healthy. These men, or "Fedayees" as Massoud called them, would be personally beholden to him, and had to be willing to die for the cause. As Aziz later recalled, Massoud told the group:

> I need a number of devotees that they should agree with me and carry out my orders. They would agree if I put them into fire, throw them in the river, or fasten a bomb on their belly and ask them to lay down under a tank.[8]

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[7] It is possible that Massoud's threat to leave was simply a ploy for aid, and he had used the same threat in Zenay, but it is more likely that this time the combination of defeats, dissent, his injury and the honour of his family may well have seriously tempted him to consider returning to Peshawar.

[8] Aziz interview, 12 October 1994, p. 5.

Soberly those assembled began thinking about young men from their villages whose names they might put forward. During tense discussions over the next few days, Matin told Massoud, "In my life I have nothing more than a pot and a cow, which I want to give you – you take the cow and slaughter it."[9] It was agreed that Paryan would provide thirty candidates if Dasht-i-Rewat would provide the same number, and Kawak and Arew would each provide ten.[10] The Paryanis, who up until that point had played a significantly lesser role in the rebellion than the Dasht-i-Rewatis – who had started the movement and could already claim a number of talented fighters – now wanted to be seen as near-equal partners.

Given that the vast majority of the fighters who had fought in the rebellion had come from Dasht-i-Rewat, the offer was somewhat unrealistic, though certainly the decision to support the war was genuine: to the Paryanis, this move seemed the best way for them to protect their villages and to continue to oppose the government. Also, by including the Dasht-i-Rewatis in the deal, Ahmad ensured that the movement remained a Bala-wide affair. Even if the Safid Chihris would revert to backing the government (as Ahmad might have suspected from his meeting

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[9] Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 24.
[10] Fazel Ahmad interview, 1 May 1995, pp. 15-17.

with Ahmad Jan a month earlier), Dasht-i-Rewat would remain a protective buffer for Paryan.

With one thousand families in Paryan, the thinking was that it would not be an excessive burden to feed sixty men and their instructors for a number of months.[11] They hoped this would be enough to reignite the rebellion. For Massoud, still seriously injured, the decision to build his assortment of militants into a coherent guerrilla force was dependent on the support of his loyal deputy, Mustafa.

Knowing the intense physical and mental strain that Massoud had been under, and probably aware that his best friend was on the brink of returning to Pakistan, Mustafa might have been surprised to find him at all when he reached Dahane Rewat. Mustafa had just escorted his own parents into exile in Pakistan. While the situation still looked bleak, the Paryani khans' pledge to support financially a front and provide Fedayees had created some hope that the movement might endure. Around the time of Mustafa's arrival, Massoud had already established a camp in Chah-e-ahoo, and with the return of his comrade of ten years the training moved into high gear.

To accomplish their goal, the two men decided that once they had selected acceptable men they would insist on a personal "oath of total devotion" to Massoud the "Amir,"

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[11] Fazel Ahmad interview, 1 May 1995, p. 16.

since for political reasons they did not want to expel faint-hearted individuals after they joined.

The ceremony was administered by Massoud in the form of a series of questions. Candidates were required to answer "Yes" to indicate their willingness to carry out each of the gory challenges. Massoud's recent serious injury seemed to strengthen the credibility of the process. He would ask the recruits:

> If I ordered you to walk from here to Badakhshan in the snow, would you obey? If I ordered you to put your arm under a tank, would you obey? If I ordered you to explode a grenade in your hand, would you obey?

Years later Massoud would take pride in the memory that of the "tens of participants" in the first meeting, "only eleven or twelve took the oath the first time."[12] The message was extraordinarily plain: anyone who joined the Fedayees should be prepared to endure all suffering, including death, in pursuit of victory.

There seems to have been a week-or-two delay between the meeting in Shari Bland and this first recruitment drive, perhaps in order to let Massoud recuperate and to give others, like Mustafa, who were taking care of personal matters, time to return. Massoud later recalled that the training started about a month after the Nuristanis left. Soon, the guerrillas' number increased to twenty and Massoud set about establishing a base and

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[12]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 24.

training the men in the art of guerrilla warfare.[13] "The Mujahedins went to Dahane Tul," Aziz remembered. "This was a very convenient place, and Massoud chose this place as his headquarters."[14]

Mustafa, who had been outranked by Ghaus in the very political early days of the rebellion, when the latter's age and military rank had been critical, assumed a major role in the Fedayee training. While Ghaus, a consummately practical ex-fighter pilot, was a stern individual who believed in mathematical solutions to problems, Mustafa, though himself an engineer, was a romantic who had thought a great deal about the theory of revolution and was thus far better suited to serve as the executive officer for the elite corps. He was also a keen student of guerrilla warfare and had spent years studying weapons manuals and explosives. His tenacity in the Salang campaign, particularly his role in the blasting of the Shikargah Bridge, earned him the title of Deputy Commander.[15]

The announcement that Mustafa would begin explosion and demolition instruction generated excitement among the Fedayees. The men had already spent time with Massoud learning how to fire a Kalashnikov AK-47 and had been lectured by Mustafa on the weapon's tactical

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[13] Ibid., pp. 24-25.
[14] Aziz interview, 10 December 1995, p. 5.
[15] Mansur refers to Ghaus as "Deputy Commander of the Panjsher Front," Diary of Jihad, p. 9. Ghaus remained active, as he had throughout the rebellion, but generally in a supporting role, working political deals, organizing logistics, and quietly counselling Massoud.

applications.[16] Mustafa had also begun instruction on how to use a rocket launcher, although, with shells being a precious commodity, he was able to fire only one or two practice rounds for the entire group to observe. Most of the men had been at Zenay and had seen the weapon in the field.[17] Grenades, though still scarce, were more plentiful, being fabricated from the stores of dynamite captured the previous summer.

This allowed for significant training, and the militants had set aside several dozen homemade explosives for the purpose. The recruits would finally have the chance to work with live ordinance and spend time with the jovial Mustafa. The grenade exercises would be a welcome break from the monotony of physical fitness training that up until this point had been a primary, and unpopular, focus of the programme.[18]

Mustafa's sudden death in an explosives accident during these exercises had a deep impact on Massoud, who would later call his deputy's death "the absolute low point of my life.... Mustafa was my everything. He was irreplaceable."[19] The effect that Mustafa's optimism, high spirits and determination had had on the movement's recovery from its darkest hours had been significant. For Massoud, his death marked the loss of perhaps the most consistent

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[16]Arab interview, 12 November 1994, p. 6.
[17]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 5 April 1995, p. 6.
[18]Arab interview, 12 November 1994, p. 5.
[19]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, p. 23.

factor in his life since the arrest and execution of their mutual friend and mentor Habib Rahman in 1974. For all of the Fedayees it was a stark illustration of the dangers that lay ahead.

The training continued at Chah-e-ahoo, but the lighthearted atmosphere that had existed during the first critical weeks following the Nuristanis' departure was gone, never to return. In its place, throughout the war, Massoud developed the ability, in trying times, to remain upbeat, often making little jokes. In this way, and perhaps others, the emulation of the fallen deputy commander was to have a lasting effect on the front's development.

One of the first major problems that the men had to confront was that by the time the Fedayee training began, fewer than twenty automatic weapons remained of the more than two hundred that had been collected during the rebellion. "Our number increased. Half of us had arms and the others did not," Massoud recalled.[20] To rectify this shortage, the fighters asked the men whom they knew had captured arms to either become Fedayees or give up their rifles. Few complied with this order and it was consequently decided to seize forcibly weapons from men who had received them during the summer fighting. A search of certain houses in Safid Chihr yielded a number

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[20]Ibid., p. 25.

of the captured weapons and, more significantly, delineated for the first time the rebels' marshal authourity over the area.

Despite their rising stature, however, the rebels seem to have soon exhausted many of the resources and goodwill of the upper-Balais, as tensions between the group and the Safid Chihris reemerged. The fighters were soon forced into a meagre existence. "We had no lamp at that time, we made candles from the fat of goats that we slaughtered for meat. We had no tea or sugar, and instead we used walnut shells [for making tea]."[21]

It is interesting, and indicative of the implicit contract with the valley's khans, that while it was considered acceptable to seize weapons by threat of force, no similar efforts were made to obtain food. The shortages were partly made up for by a number of Panjsheri traders and khans who continued secretly to send the rebels assistance despite the disapproval of some of the other khans. Much of this relief was delivered at night to prevent the government or Ahmad Jan sympathizers from knowing its source.

Return to the Pa'een

When the men had reached a satisfactory level of competence, the decision was made to take the group, then

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[21] Ibid., p. 25.

about fifty strong, down the valley to "renew the commitment" of various men who had supported the rebellion and to retrain them. Massoud was eager to use his newly trained force to try to reactivate veterans of the rebellion: "The programme was to go to all the sub-valleys of Panjsher. From valley to valley we set up centres."[22] Additionally, there remained the question of the ownership of weapons seized during the summer; clearly Massoud wanted to control as many arms as possible. The front's position was that "if someone captured an arm, he cannot claim ownership. The arm should be handed over to the headquarters. No ownership can be claimed." It was also decided that the "commitment" would involve a non-compete clause: "No one is allowed to form a special group for himself, everything should belong to a single authourity."[23] This was in part directed at Ahmad Jan and the people of Safid Chihr, about whom Massoud had been receiving increasingly alarming reports.

Similarly, despite the fifty-percent Paryani, fifty-percent Dasht-i-Rewati force envisioned by Fazel Ahmad, in reality about two-thirds of the initial recruits came from Dasht-i-Rewat while the remaining third were mainly from Paryan, with only two volunteers from the Pa'een. In all, about ninety-four percent of the Fedayees were Balais (Table 1 below).

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[22] Ibid., p. 25.
[23] Ibid., pp. 25-26.

Table 1:

LIST OF ORIGINAL PANJSHER FRONT FEDAYEE*

NAME	*VILLAGE*	*AGE*	*ROLE IN REBELLION*
M. Ibrihim	***Dahane Rewat***	*22*	***Salang***
A. Ghafur	***Dahane Rewat***	*20*	***Salang***
M. Arab	***Dahane Rewat***	*40*	
M. Razzaq	***Dahane Rewat***	*28*	
M. Khalid			
Sayad Jafar			
M. Aman	***Dasht-i-Rewat***	*22*	***Darband***
M. Gada	***Dasht-i-Rewat***	*22*	
A. Razzaq			
Hazrat Jan			
Doaud Shah			
Ahmad Nur			
Amir Hamza	***Grenju***	*28*	
Rahim Khoda	***Grenju***	*20*	
M. Nazim			
Ghulam Dastigir			
Ghulam Ahmad			
Azmuddine	***Bazarak***	*28*	
A. Wasie	***Shasht***	*28*	
M. Hakim			
Rahman Beg			
Abdul Aziz	***Grenju***	*28*	***Koh-r Surkh***
Ghulam Mustafa			
Merajuddin			
A. Hanan			
A. Hanan II(?)			
Haji A. Matin*	***Dahane-Rewat***	*55*	
Qaryadar			
Nazar M.			
M. Sadiq			

*Source: Hafiz Mansur, Diary of a Jihad, p. 8; and information collected during author interviews.
**Matin was not a real fighter, but had honourary Fedayee status.

This composition of fighters contrasted with the predominantly Pa'eeni leadership of the militants, who were now the "instructors." In the absence of Mustafa,

Tarjuman Abdul Haq, a Balai, now played an increasingly important role in supporting Massoud and his kinsman Ghaus, both Pa'eenis, and Zabet Agha Gul, who was from Shamali and also considered a flatlander.[24] Their chaplain Mawlawi Abdul Latif was another Pa'eeni.

Ahmad Jan, their former partner, recognizing this disparity and hoping to discredit Massoud, with whom he had now completely fallen out, attempted to disparage the rebel commander and the other militant leaders as outsiders in the Bala. Recalled Massoud:

> They were making attempts to divide Panjsher into two parts, Bala and Pa'een, and provoking differences. I am from Pa'een while the Mujahedin and commanders were all from Bala. I was alone. Ahmad Jan was inciting the people to not allow a man from Pa'een to come here and be a commander: "[Massoud] should go back to his village. He has no money. The work of the state is in progress."[25]

The problem was, to a great extent, alleviated by the fact that while Massoud and others began taking on more formal leadership roles, in a very real sense Matin, Fazel Ahmad and other Balai khans were still in charge. Not only did they control the purse strings, but they also maintained the loyalty of their clansmen enlisted as Fedayees. If a problem arose with one of the recruits, the militants would take the issue directly to that man's khan, and if one of the men had a problem with the front's leadership, he could rely on his khan to resolve it. With most of the

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[24]Even more foreign to a Bolahi than a Pa'eeni.
[25]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 28 September 1994, pp. 23-24.

khans in the villages above Dasht-i-Rewat supporting the movement, Ahmad Jan's argument was greatly diminished.

Much as with the mullahs - outsiders who were brought in by the khans to provide services, were given authority in their field, and were treated with respect and paid - the rebels quickly became integrated into the villages. This arrangement had the benefit for the militants that politically they were viewed as representatives of the khans, and thus were given respect similar to that accorded to the traditional leaders themselves. And as outsiders they did not have to worry much about local politics. This might have worked less well in other places, but with men as respected and direct in their communications as Matin and Fazel Ahmad, there were apparently few problems, even despite the animosity some of their own clansmen felt towards the militants.

Massoud, Ghaus and their colleagues attempted to organize the Fedayee, much as they had planned the rebellion before it, so as to eliminate the distinctions between the clans and to elevate their shared identify as "Panjsheris." "I asked the people of Dasht-i-Rewat to make an oath on the holy Koran not to flare up ethnic conflict," Massoud said, "and after that we were all brothers among ourselves and started our Jihad."[26] As the fall of 1979 wore on, however, it became clear that Ahmad

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[26]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 5 April 1995, p. 6.

Jan's ongoing provocations to the south posed a real and grave threat to the rebels' political strategy. Quite literally, the Safid Chihris became a bottleneck restricting the rebels' ability to broaden their guerrilla movement below the northern end of Safid Chihr.

Greatly alarmed by this state of affairs, Massoud decided to confront the problem before it assumed uncontrollable proportions and headed for Safid Chihr for a meeting with Jan. As he recalled later:

> There was no other choice, either we had to fight against Ahmad Jan or make reconciliation with him... All the Mujahedin, all the guests, the people from Shamali, all in all we were sixty men. We had little weapons but we were sixty people. I thought and thought, but could not find a solution. I said, "We are going to his house." So we went directly to Ahmad Jan's house.[27]

A heated meeting at the wrestler's residence failed to produce results, as Jan refused to acknowledge Massoud's authority. Yet Massoud clearly had the upper hand, as a growing number of the town's residents, including several of Ahmad Jan's people, expressed their readiness to join the rebellion. Ignoring a desperate attempt by Ahmad Jan to convince the fighters to stay in the town and mend fences, which Massoud and his officers suspected to be yet another devious ploy, the rebel force departed en route for the town of Sha'bah, which they reached after a few days of hazardous journey in the snowy mountains.

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[27] Ibid., p. 7.

Locating themselves in the large house of a local supporter, in the mountains above the town, the rebels were assigned their first operation by Massoud: an ambush of a government convoy. "Massoud [wanted] to see the skill and the operation of the group," recalled Aziz. "For this reason he sent a number of the Mujahedin down the valley and he himself became the [overall] commander of the operation."[28]

Return to Bazarak

This baptism of fire was an unqualified success. Waiting along the side of the road one night, the rebels attacked a truck, killing a couple of officers and injuring some others. In the pocket of one of the dead officers, most likely an intelligence operative, the rebels found four thousand Afghani in cash. The truck was also carrying three hundred kilograms of sugar.[29]

Emboldened by this success, Massoud made an important strategic decision. Having learned that government forces had quit Bazarak and were garrisoned in Rukha, he decided to return to his hometown. Setting out for Bazarak with half his forces, Massoud left Mohammad Gada, who had distinguished himself on the first day of the rebellion, in command at the base they had set up in Sha'bah.

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[28]Aziz interview, 10 December 1995, p. 9.
[29]Ahmad Shah Massoud interviews, 28 September 1994, p. 26, and 5 April 1995, p. 11; Aziz interview, 12 October 1994, p. 9.

"Commander Gada was more intelligent than the others. Therefore, I assigned him as the commander in Sha'bah and we went to [Bazarak]," Massoud explained.[30]

At this point the political situation in the lower valley remained extremely jumbled as men like Bashi Sa'duddin, the khan of Bazarak, who had led men into battle against government forces during the rebellion, were compelled to embrace the Communists, much as Anwar had while in detention eighteen months earlier. Like many of the other chiefs, Sa'duddin had established cordial relations with the government intelligence officials who had moved in when the front collapsed, and had done his utmost to put them at ease. He did not like them hanging around his town and hoped that by being polite he could minimize their presence.[31]

Recognizing how tense the situation in the Panjsher remained, the Amin government, not noted for restraint, had exercised caution in the key Persian valley. That decision may well have been guided by Soviet security personnel; by September, some two to three thousand Soviet officers were reported to already be in the country, working closely with the Afghan security forces.[32] The Soviets, more familiar with Afghan history than their U.S.

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[30]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 5 April 1995, p. 11.
[31]Bashi Sa'duddin Khan interview, June 1994.
[32]International Herald Tribune, 21 September 1979.

counterparts, well understood the Tajiks' significance in the nation's development.

Between the time of the collapse of the front at Feraj and the Fedayees' first ambush in Sha'bah, fewer than a dozen Panjsheris had been arrested and only the Bazarak malawi, Haji Buhanuddine Jan, and his two sons are believed to have been executed.[33] Still, a climate of fear pervaded the valley as stories of mass executions continued to filter out from Kabul. All knew that the peace in the Panjsher was fragile, though the disingenuous but earnest pledges of men like Sa'duddin that the rebel movement was finished may have helped lull government representatives into a false sense of security. Even the attack on the military vehicle at Sha'bah might have been minimized as a criminal act, though officers in Rukha were likely disturbed by the incident.[34]

Arriving in the Parandi Valley above Bazarak in late November 1979 with some twenty men, Massoud apparently received a cool reception. "In Parandi the people gathered," the commander later remembered. "Bashi Sa'duddin and other people like him and Bashi Amir were against this [establishment of a rebel base]. They had contact with Parchamis."[35] Although a number of men came out to greet the party, none seemed willing to shelter the

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[33]Bashi Sa'duddin Khan interview, June 1994. Also see Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 96.
[34]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 5 April 1995, p. 11.
[35]Ibid., p. 11.

outlaws in their home until a former army officer, Toran Abdullah Jan, finally stepped forward.

Abdullah Jan was one of the most respected men of the clan, and while Sa'duddin was willing to criticize Massoud in the hope of driving him out of town, he would not go as far as to countermand his venerated kinsman's invitation. "When we were settled in the house of Abdullah, people demonstrated against us and protested our stay in Parandi," Aziz recalled. "They were claiming that 'If you stay here then war will break out and we will be faced with difficulties and trouble.'"[36]

While it was less of a welcome than the guerrilla chief might have hoped for, it was much warmer than the treatment he had received when departing his own village, just two kilometres away, the previous fall, when armed relatives tried to facilitate his capture. Massoud was back in the Pa'een. He was determined to make the most of the opportunity.

For a number of days the guerrillas remained holed up in the dwelling just off the main road, rising early each morning to recite Koranic verses, dispatching a few messengers and spies, and discussing plans, but remaining hidden and out of touch with the local population. Fearful of detection and not knowing what to do next, their spirits began to sink.

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[36]Aziz interview, 12 October 1994, p. 10.

Then one day Sa'duddin came to visit them. Seeing the dejected looks on the guerrillas' faces as they sat around the house, he suggested that they go to Bazarak "and tell the people whatever you have."[37] Massoud seized the moment to talk through his differences with Sa'duddin. Within days, the two men had developed a routine as they travelled from village to village promoting their cause. Sa'duddin would introduce Massoud, speaking of his accomplishments. Vigorously gesticulating as was his habit, the khan would denounce the Communist regime and, holding his lips in an expressive downturned position, inquire of the villagers if, as good Muslims, they could afford not to oppose the non-believers.[38]

Massoud, in a quiet, reverent mode, would then recite chapters of the Koran and speak about the virtues and history of their people and the aims of his movement. Following the khan's passionate words, the serenity of the amir's presentation seems to have had a pleasing, almost hypnotic, effect on the audiences. When he was finished, Massoud simply asked the people if they would join the movement.[39] Of the ten or fifteen presentations they made in the first couple of weeks to small groups of Sa'duddin's kinsmen up and down the Parande valley,

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[37]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 5 April 1995, p. 11.
[38]Bashi Sa'duddin Khan interview, 18 June 1994.
[39]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 5 April 1995, p. 11.

virtually all listeners pledged support.[40] "At that time [Sa'duddin] made a good initiative and he joined us to the people," Massoud later acknowledged. "Otherwise we were an exiled group."[41]

In each village, after recruiting men, Sa'duddin and Massoud assigned a financial representative to collect taxes in wheat and livestock to be delivered to the front's local headquarters. The system worked quite well and soon they had covered all of the Khan's villages between Bazarak and Andarab. The guerrillas soon moved into a house owned by Sa'duddin in a safer location, four or five kilometres north of Bazarak. In this way, the khan both alleviated the risk of harbouring the rebels in Abdullah Jan's house, just several hundred metres above the town, and, as their host, took direct responsibility for their movement, much as Fazel Ahmad had done in Paryan earlier that autumn.[42]

Having canvassed all of Sa'duddin's territory, Massoud decided to cross the Panjsher River and start working in the opposite valley known as Manjahor. As in Parandi, he initially had trouble making headway and Sa'duddin, being an outsider, was of no help. Eventually, through the help of a local supporter, Massoud got a start

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[40]Bashi Sa'duddin Khan interview, 18 June 1994. Parande is a valley running due north of Bazarak that connects it to Andarab. Traditionally, it has been ruled by the khan of Bazarak.
[41]Ahmad Shah Massoud interview, 5 April 1995, p. 11.
[42]Ibid., p. 11.

and began his political activities on the northeast bank of the Panjsher. Shortly afterward, the khan of Manjahor, Bashi Amir, and his son Azim joined the movement.[43]

This success was quickly overshadowed on December 10, 1979, when twenty-one Mujahedin were killed on the bridge in Bazarak in a nighttime government attack. Two rebels were captured alive and executed two days later by government supporters in the Dashtak vicinity.[44]

Moscow Acts

Earlier that same day, the Soviet defence minister, Dimitri Ustinov, had summoned his chief of staff, General Nikolai Ogarkov, and informed him that the Politburo had decided to deploy at least seventy-five thousand troops to Afghanistan. According to one account Ogarkov was "surprised and outraged" by such a decision, and said that seventy-five thousand would not stabilize the situation and that he was against the introduction of troops, calling it "reckless." The defence minister cut him off harshly: "Are you going to teach the Politburo? Your only duty is to carry out the orders."

Accordingly, late in the day, Directive 321/12/00133 was issued by the Soviet Defence Ministry providing for the formation of a new army in the Turestan Military District. So fearful was Ustinov about the authorization

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[43]Ibid., p. 12; Aziz interview, 12 October 1995, p. 11.
[44]Mansur, Diary of Jihad, p. 9.

being disclosed by even the highest levels of the Red Army, that he appears to have insisted on it being conveyed to his senior generals orally.[45]

The Rebellion in Perspective

What effect the Panjsher Rebellion - which had erupted in June of that year and almost immediately cut off Kabul's communist regime from the USSR - had on the Politburo's decision remains, in part, a subject for speculation. As was described in Chapter 5, it was this event, and the resulting spectre of a specific and ongoing strategic security threat to the Kabul regime, that set off a chain of events beginning in late June 1979. The Soviet deployment of special operations forces to Bagram Airbase and Prime Minister Hafisullah Amin's taking over the Ministry of Defence portfolio both appear to have been direct consequences of the Salang event.

The deployment may have drawn Soviet personnel into engagements in the Panjsher such as the December 10 attack in Bazarak, and it certainly provided Moscow with direct reports of the ongoing insurgency in the northeast. At the same time, Amin's assumption of the defence post, for which the Panjsher Rebellion served as a critical pretext, effectively elevated him to the position of Commander-in-Chief, creating the power base from which he ordered the

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[45]Lyakhovsky, The Tragedy and Valor of Afghan, pp. 109-112.

assassination of President Taraki in mid-September 1979. Together these factors, directly triggered by Massoud's return to the country in May 1979, greatly alarmed the Soviet leadership about the future of Communism in Afghanistan. [46]

The Soviet decision to intervene has been widely linked directly to Amin's homicidal behaviour and the risks it posed for the USSR. Yet were it not for the presence of a specific domestic security threat, Amin's continued leadership may have been palatable for the Politburo. In and of itself, it did not pose a direct threat to Soviet hegemony in northern Afghanistan, whereas the Panjsher revolt did.[47]

The events of the subsequent three years show that once the Soviets became enmeshed in the foreign campaign, the Persian front and its defenders quickly became the principal threat to the Fortieth Army, as the Soviet forces in Afghanistan became known. Between April 1980 and September 1982 the Red Army launched at least six major offensives into the strategic Panjsher Valley, none with lasting results. In January 1983, a KGB official

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[46]The killing probably took place on 15 September 1979. See Arnold, Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism, pp. 84-98, for the best analysis of the Soviet motivation to remove Amin. Also see Bradsher, Afghanistan and the Soviet Union, pp. 173-180.

[47]Arnold cites the importance of the cutting of the Salang Highway, which he describes as "Kabul's main land route north the USSR," but he mistakenly identifies it as a September event; undoubtedly the two-month lag was a function of the scant reporting the event initially received, Afghanistan's Two-Party Communism, p. 87. Also see Urban, War in Afghanistan, pp. 44, 144-145, for further discussions on the strategic importance of the Salang route.

signed a cease-fire protocol directly with Commander Massoud. By that point the USSR's prospects of suppressing the Persian resistance in northeastern Afghanistan had effectively ended. One year later, peace talks began in Geneva, leading to the final Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in early 1989.

The decision to invade Afghanistan and "remove H. Amin by the hands of KGB special agents" was made on December 8, 1979, by "a narrow circle" of the Central Committee and was implemented two days later by the Soviet defence minister.[48] All this was in stark contrast to the Central Committee's response to the March 1979 killing of several dozen advisors in Herat on the Iranian border. At that time, after reasoned discussion within the Central Committee, Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin phoned President Taraki to refuse politely to commit Soviet personnel, telling him, "I do not want to disappoint you, but it will not be possible to conceal this. Two hours later the whole world will know about this."[49] The basic question remains, what changed from March to December?

The Soviets could dismiss the Herat event in March as essentially a terrorist attack on an isolated periphery - suppressible, in characteristic Soviet form, with more

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[48] Lyakhovsky, The Tragedy and Valor of Afghan, p. 109.

[49] Transcript of telephone conversation between Kosygin and Taraki, from "The Soviet Union and Afghanistan 1978-1989: Documents from the Russian and East German Archives," in Cold War International History Project Electronic Bulletin, Issues 8-9 (Winter 1996/97), Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, Washington, D.C., p. 26.

terror. Similar excuses could be made regarding the Nuristani rebellion along the Pakistani border. However, as was shown in Chapter 5, the cutting of the Salang Highway, in contrast, was perceived as a strategic assault requiring a strategic response. Though declassified Soviet records do not directly point to the Salang event as the cause of the intervention, considering the reasoned and cautious comments made at the March 1979 Central Committee meeting in the wake of perhaps the gravest attacks on Soviet personnel since World War II, one can hardly imagine that just six months later the security incidents occurring in the Southern tribal belt, including Paktia, Nangahar and Kandahar Provinces, would be deemed sufficient grounds for intervention.

As Ispahani points out, "The significant events that led to the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan - the legacy of the Great Game, the making of the Durand Line, the Afghan-Pakistani quarrel over the future 'state' of Pashtunistan - were all caught up in the web of Central and South Asian Routes."[50] From the Soviet perspective, the roads connecting Kabul with the southern and eastern tribal belt towns were of secondary importance. Of primary importance were the routes connecting Kabul with the USSR, and political control of the historically tranquil northern territories surrounding them.

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[50] Ispahani, Roads and Rivals, p. 84.

Arguments by Klass and others that the primary objective of the invasion was to secure warm water access seem equally improbable.[51] By 1979 the leadership in Moscow seems to have become, through a decade and a half of active engagement with Washington, quite realistic about the limits of Soviet power beyond their own borders.

Proceeding inductively, and recognizing that the USSR, since unwittingly gaining entry into Afghanistan in 1955, had repeatedly cited a critical security interest in the northern part of the country relative to the presence of the fifty million Muslims on the far side of the Amu Darya River, and also that no other rebellions took place in northern Afghanistan in 1978 or 1979 posing a significant threat to the Kabul supply lines, one is led to conclude that one of the critical catalysts leading to the USSR's 1979 intervention was the nationalist Persian rebels' closing of the Salang Highway in June-July 1979.

Significant fault has been levelled at the Carter Administration for failing explicitly to challenge suspicious Soviet troop movements immediately prior to the invasion. Even Douglas Brinkley, a sympathetic biographer of Jimmy Carter's, has accused Carter of having "championed a post-cold-war foreign policy before the cold war was over." As Brinkley concludes in The Unfinished Presidency, "The stupidity of the Soviet invasion of

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[51]See Klass (ed.), The Great Game Revisited, pp. 1-30.

Afghanistan turned Carter into a hawk."[52] Prior to the actual event, Carter, a committed believer in détente, could not be persuaded that a Soviet offensive war was likely.[53]

Regional instability, highlighted by the toppling of the Bhutto and Pahlavi governments, of course was also a significant factor in the Soviet decision.[54] The 1977 military takeover in Islamabad and Khomeini's 1979 revolution in Tehran demonstrated the tremendous vulnerability of Moscow's underbelly. Were the Amin regime to fall, Soviet Central Asia would be encircled by a group of anti-Soviet Islamic governments stretching from Azerbaijan to Kashmir. That the Soviets effectively had been handed a special interest in Afghanistan by inept post-World War II U.S. diplomacy could only have heightened the Kremlin's desire to combat the Islamic and nationalist trends in that state following the Salang incident in the summer of 1979. Again, considering the

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[52] Douglas Brinkley, The Unfinished Presidency (New York: Viking, 1998), pp. 20-23.

[53] See Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, Power and Principle (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1983).

[54] Additionally, according to Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, "The Kabul [KGB] residency reported, possibly inaccurately, that secret meetings had taken place at the end of September between representatives of Amin and the 'extreme Muslim opposition,' at which the possibility of expelling all Soviet officials, releasing all imprisoned Muslim rebels, and ending the civil war had been discussed." Certain officers in the KGB had come to believe that the only way to prevent Afghanistan falling into the Islamic orbit was direct Soviet intervention, the first step of which "was to assemble a dependably pro-Soviet Afghan government-in-waiting to take power after the overthrow of Amin." On 25 October 1979, a KGB officer, Alexander Petrov, met in Prague with Babrak Karmal, the leader of the Parcham faction, who was then serving as Afghan ambassador to Czechoslovakia. Andrew and Mitrokhin, The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World (New York: Basic Books, 2005), pp. 397-398.

reasoned arguments made in March 1979 following the Herat event by veteran détentists such as Dmitry Ustinov and Yuri Andropov, their decision to champion intervention at the critical December 8 meeting, and the high risks associated with that course, seem to indicate a desperation caused by nothing less than a perceived *security* threat to the USSR itself.[55]

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[55] Georgy M. Kornienko, The Cold War: Testimony of a Participant (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye, 1994), pp. 193-195. Also see Andrew and Mitrokhin, The World Was Going Our Way, p. 269: "Gromyko's influence on the decision, however, was clearly inferior to that of Andropov and Ustinov. KGB special forces played a more important role in the invasion than any other previous conflict, and were charged with the assassination of the supposedly traitorous President Hafizullah Amin." Though one senior KGB officer attributed this decision to a "Kremlin fantasy," claiming that "a great breakthrough [in Afghanistan] would demonstrate [Soviet] effectiveness, showing the world that Communism was the ascendant political system," these sentiments, while pointing the blame at the top leadership, seem difficult to prove as being a causative factor.

Conclusion

On December 24, 1979, the Soviet Union began its intervention in Afghanistan. As Samuel Huntington writes in his 1996 study The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, the ensuing ten-year war's "impact on the Islamic world was, in effect, comparable to the impact which the Japanese defeat of the Russians in 1905 had on the Oriental world."[1] As such, in conclusion it is worthwhile examining some of the specific factors that guided Ahmad Shah Massoud and his cadre towards their ultimate leadership of the critical 1979 Panjsher Rebellion, and to briefly review how those factors shaped the movement's success. The introduction noted that, to a large extent, credit for this rebellion belongs to a broad leadership group. However, as in other momentous geo-political events, in the Panjsher revolt it was the personal drive and inspiration of one leader, above all, that became emblematic of the entire endeavour. Having covered in detail in the body of this work the contributions of the nationalist cadre, this conclusion will focus on the commander of the Panjsher resistance.

Egalitarian *and* highly traditional in his nationalistic outlook, Massoud was exactly the type of person destined to challenge effectively the might of the USSR. Much like certain celebrated figures of North

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[1] Samuel P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), pp. 247-247.

America's anti-colonial struggle, the key founder of the Persian resistance of the 1980s was able to accomplish dramatic political changes while not disrupting the general underpinnings of his society specifically because he was deeply aware of it. Schooled by nationalist leaders such as Faizani, Burhanuddin Rabbani and Mohammad Anwar, as described in Chapters 2 and 3, not to mention a handful of French educators at the elite Lycée Istiqlal in Kabul, Massoud well understood by May 1979 that initiating an effective rebellion would require a full partnership with the Panjsher Valley's traditional leaders. His plan, upon returning from exile in Pakistan, was to win the support of the khans of the upper Panjsher with logical and precedented arguments similar to those used by Anwar in initiating the original Nuristani rebellion the previous summer.

Massoud did not at first possess the strength to displace any of the chiefs and knew there would be risks in alienating any of them. He also knew that the movement would eventually become much stronger if he could incorporate broad segments of the populace into it. He was a member of one of the most distinguished clans in the Panjsher, with a father who had served as the valley's nominal commander as a young boy during World War I, a paternal grandfather who had personally served an earlier amir, and a maternal grandfather who was a respected

attorney from the principal Panjsheri town of Rukha. This, as much as any factor, provided him with useful contacts and access to men such as Haji Abdul Matin and Ahmad Jan, who were critical in sparking the rebellion.[2]

The militants' success from the first days, however, went far beyond Massoud's personal stature in the community. In particular, what stands out in so many of the published accounts of the early days are testimonies regarding his remarkable energy and drive.

This factor is widely attributed, behaviourally and perhaps genetically, to Massoud's mother, a learned though not formally educated woman, who instilled in all of her children a sense of public spirit and enterprise. She had been "a strong character exerting a lot of influence on her children," Massoud's older brother Yahya told an interviewer in 1982.[3] She once rebuked her husband when he suggested buying one of Massoud's brothers a motorbike as a reward for a positive report card, saying, "Do your children ride horses? Can they use guns? Are they able to be in society with people? These are the characteristics that make a man."[4]

Dost Mohammad's wife had taught herself to read and it is interesting that Massoud, from a young age, used his

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[2] This point was confirmed by Engineer Ayoub in an interview on 12 December 2004.
[3] Sandy Gall, Behind Russian Lines (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), p. 79.
[4] Coll, Ghost Wars, p. 109.

intellect to help tutor other children. Later, he would encourage his fighters, with an almost religious zeal, to teach themselves to read. As a teenager during the 1967 Six-Day War, with coaching from his father, a formally trained military officer and by then a colonel, Massoud took it upon himself to lecture his classmates daily on the conflict's developments. This relentless determination, undoubtedly later strengthened by the horrors of the 1978 Communist coup and its aftermath, appears to have primarily derived from the influence of his publicly-spirited mother.

Although she had died prematurely during the years Massoud was in exile in Pakistan, the presence of his younger brother, Ahmad Zia, at his side for much of the rebellion, and of his sister, Mrs. Mohammad Ghaus, who cared for him while he was recuperating from his wounds during the late summer of 1979, as well as the fact that much of the drama of the rebellion occurred within a short distance of his family's native village of Jangalak, could only have reinforced these values.

Beyond connections and a deep desire and drive to serve the interests of a state Persian-Afghans had played such a central role in building, the third attribute commonly ascribed to Massoud and his militant colleagues, particularly Mustafa, was an uncanny understanding of historical figures and particularly ones involved in

recent revolutionary events. This factor, propelled by a personal appreciation of the central role played by Persians in the development of Afghanistan, enabled the young militants to envision the rebellion well in advance of its realization. By comparing the situation to events such as the Cuban Revolution and the French resistance during World War II, they convinced themselves, and many others, that they could see into the future. The realization that contemporary events could have a profound impact on the direction of cultures greatly heartened the militants, who often discussed the broad studies that they had conducted in Pakistan. These had included works by Mao; "Le livre de Mao, il est trés bon," Massoud told a reporter in 1982, presumably in reference to a Persian copy of the Chinese leader's autobiography he had read. He also praised works by Che Guevara and Regis Debray, as well as a non-conventional warfare guide published by U.S. Special Forces.[5] Personal visits with foreigners who had participated in opposition struggles in places such as South Africa and Iran added to this historical analysis of contemporary liberation movements.[6]

Almost from the moment of Massoud's early political awakening during the Six-Day War, his quest for historical understanding became a means of realizing that he could, as a paradoxically *enfranchised* ethnic minority, have an

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[5] Gall, Behind Russian Lines, p. 155.
[6] Es-Haq interview, 5 October 1994.

impact on his own country's path amid national deterioration caused by Soviet subversion. It was this third factor, an identification with historical events and an understanding of certain resistance leaders, which provided the factual basis to convince skeptics such as Bashi Sa'duddin, khan of Bazarak, that resistance, however modest initially, could over time have significant results.

The next key characteristic was Massoud's belief in teamwork. He recognized in his mid-twenties the significance of what management expert Warren Bennis would later call the phenomenon of the *Great Group*. Bennis, whose early work on the subject as a young economics professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology was spurred by a lecture given by Margaret Mead, concluded that "the usual way of looking at groups and leadership, as separate phenomena, was no longer adequate."[7] He recognized that extraordinary results – such as the 1937 production of Snow White, the first full-length animated film, or the Manhattan Project's completion of the atomic bomb in 1945 – were products less of individual leaders' actions than of the dynamic creativity of sophisticated teams. "The most exciting groups," Bennis wrote in the book he eventually published on the subject in 1997,

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[7] Warren Bennis, Organizing Genius: The Secrets of Creative Collaboration (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1997), p. xv.

"resulted from a mutually respectful marriage between an able leader and an assembly of extraordinary people."[8]

Although Massoud was unaware of Bennis' argument, its thesis appears to have been central to the commander's planning when he returned to the Panjsher some eighteen years before the book's publication. From the outset, the young rebel leader was determined to recruit the most extraordinary and able people for the rebellion, regardless of their religious education or religious views.

In his description of the development of the Afghan resistance organizations in 1978-79, Olivier Roy calls Jamiat, of which Massoud was one of two principal military commanders, the "dominant party," attributing this to the fact that since the earliest days of the Herat and Panjsher Rebellions it "had renounced its quintessential [fundamentalist] character to absorb people who were not ideologically committed."[9] This pragmatism, though arguably a central feature of Afghan-Persian culture itself, was evident in the elaborate efforts Massoud made in recruiting the agnostic Ahmad Jan and his earlier service under the firmly atheist initiator of the Nuristani rebellion, Mohammad Anwar. In addition to

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[8] Ibid., p. xvi.

[9] Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan, p. 120. Ismail Khan, who played a role in the March 1979 Herat uprising and thereafter became the key commander of western Afghanistan until 1996, returned in 2001 and served as governor until the summer of 2004.

taking this pragmatic, or perhaps more accurately, *nationalistic,* view towards religious orthodoxy in the early days of the rebellion, Massoud simply looked for the best talent he could find. Consequently, in addition to prominent individuals such as Abdul Matin and Sa'duddin Khan, scores of Panjsheris of modest origins such as Abdul Aziz, previously an obscure but highly intelligent auto mechanic, quickly found themselves at the centre of a burgeoning movement and were treated with a level of respect similar to that bestowed on the recognized leaders and scions of the valley.

The synthesis of individuals from diverse backgrounds was perhaps the late Mawlawi Faizani's most significant contribution to the key rebellion which would spawn the anti-Soviet nationalist movement of the 1980s. As Edwards writes, Faizani's "openness to people from various backgrounds" enabled the Muslim Youth for a time to "hold the loyalty of some Shi'a students."[10] The inter-sectarian experience in Faizani's circle may have had a significant impact on Massoud. Though the Panjsher has only a small non-Tajik Hazara minority (almost entirely Sunni), throughout the rebellion, and later, the commander consistently made a significant effort to blunt clan loyalties and to put an end to terms such as "bad bloods," which previously had been used to describe some of the

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[10]Edwards, Before Taliban, p. 230.

poorer clans.[11] In these ways, Massoud manifested many of the characteristics of leaders highlighted in Bennis' book, such as General Grove, the nominal "commander" of the Manhattan Project, whose approach to leadership was simply to recruit the most talented individuals he could, foster a meritorious working environment, and ensure that team members were supplied with the necessary resources to pursue their research and development.

An inclination for team building alone, however, does not sufficiently explain the militants' success in the Panjsher. It seems that there was a fifth distinct component of Massoud's successful leadership of the rebellion, one which, in particular, points to the speed with which he was able to integrate into the culture of the upland khans.

To use the words of historian James Collins, this factor could be described as a blend of "extreme personal humility with intense professional will."[12] In a 2000 study, Collins and a team of researchers combed the financial results over fifteen years for America's five hundred largest publicly-owned corporations before selecting eleven organizations whose values had outperformed market averages by 342 percent to 1,850 percent. After completing exhaustive interviews of the

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[11] Said Aga interview, 5 June 1994.
[12] James Collins, Good to Great (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001), p. 21.

chief executives at these, and eleven underperforming comparison companies, Collins' team came to an unexpected conclusion. The leaders in the higher-performing group were, in the researchers' words, "all cut from the same cloth."[13] Furthermore, the study showed, "the absence of [such] leadership showed up as a consistent pattern in the comparison companies."[14] While the second facet of this condition — Massoud's intense belief in public service — has already been mentioned, it is the former characteristic, his modesty, undoubtedly in part due to the stunning failure of the 1975 rebellion, that completes the pentagonal explanation of the success of the 1979 movement.

The leadership of the Panjsher Rebellion could well have served as a case study for the correlation between organizational success and managerial humility. The adjectives emanating from Collins' research — "quiet, humble, modest, reserved, shy, gracious, mild-mannered, self-effacing, understated"[15] — could fairly be applied to key leaders like Haji Matin, Mustafa, Agha Gul, Aziz, Mohammad Pannar, Haji Zahir and Fazel Ahmad, who, partly as a result of their educated, mercantilist and

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[13]The researchers identified eleven comparison companies that "were in the same industry as the good-to-great companies with the same opportunities and similar resources" over the same fifteen-year period when the outstanding results were achieved." Collins, Good to Great, p. 8. The fifteen-year transition periods ranged from 1964 to 1999.

[14]Collins, Good to Great, p. 22.

[15]Ibid., p. 27.

militaristic Persian culture, comfortably subordinated themselves to Massoud and his lieutenants. It is here that Mountstuart Elphinstone's second definition of Tajik culture, from 1809, cited in Footnote 1 of this Thesis, can best be understood. ("They are excellent infantry, particularly among the hills."[16]) This pattern of understatement and cohesion has often been described by commentators who observed the Panjsher resistance in the 1980s.

As Sandy Gall pointed out in his 1982 book, "Massoud was a good listener"; the author added that the guerrilla chief "talked about his position with almost clinical detachment."[17] This perspective was undoubtedly encouraged in the rebellion's early days by his association with his older brother-in-law, Major Mohammad Ghaus, a career fighter pilot whom Massoud revered and who was personally driven to avenge the executions of several hundred of his brother officers that took place in the early days of Afghanistan's second Communist coup in 1978.

It had been only through Massoud's family's connections and their diligence in winning the release of Ghaus that he had been spared a similar fate. Though Massoud was the nominal head of the group of militants that returned to the Panjsher in May 1979, it is clear

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[16]Mountstuart Elphinstone, An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul (Karachi: Oxford University Press, reprint 1972), p. 409.
[17]Gall, Behind Russian Lines, p. 48.

from accounts that Ghaus, with his contacts in the capital, probably within Faizani's circle of officers, and his personal ties to Massoud, functioned as the architect of the campaign and bestowed a sense of decorum and competence that were fundamental to its early success.

In addition, Massoud was strongly influenced by his experience with other seasoned and unassuming leaders such as Anwar in Nuristan, where he learned first-hand the critical importance of civil administration in waging guerrilla war. In contrast to the self-aggrandizing political rhetoric of the Pakistani-based political leaders, Massoud, by adopting the role of a field officer and serving at, or near, the front for most of the rebellion, styled himself as a hands-on practitioner rather than a visible figurehead of the movement that he would go on to play such a key role in building.

While the commonly ascribed factors — his intense energy, his family's civic values and a sense of history — should not be underestimated, these three additional characteristics — his societal position, his rigorous inclination to build teams, and his modest persona — were also highly significant in the genesis of Afghanistan's Persian nationalist movement of the 1980s.

As the events of the early 1990s demonstrate, the USSR's grasp on its Muslim and particularly its Baltic republics, by the late 1970s, was weak. Uzbekistan and

Tajikistan, on the Afghan border, were perceived to be vulnerable to events in northern Afghanistan, where hundreds of thousands of their citizens had fled after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution.[18] While the dissolution of the USSR caught international observers off guard, few individuals living outside of the country were more enthusiastic about the potential demise of Moscow's grasp of Soviet Central Asia than the northern leaders of Afghanistan's Islamic Youth movement. Of this group, by December 1979, Ahmad Shah Massoud already stood out, as an individual, as a member of an ethnic group that had played a major role in the development of his nation over the previous one hundred fifty to two hundred years and, perhaps most significantly, as a representative of a hearty upland subset of that group that was willing to challenge the greatest threat posed to the country's independence in the twentieth century.

This group's presence in the critical territory between the supply lines established by President Jimmy Carter's CIA following the assassination of the American envoy to Kabul in February 1979, and the primary overland route from the Soviet Union through the Hindu Kush to the Afghan capital, was to be a decisive factor in the ultimate outcome of the Soviet intervention. While today it is increasingly being recognized by popular authors

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[18]For a good account, see Hopkirk, Setting the East Ablaze.

such as Steve Coll, George Crile and others, as was cited in the introduction, that the Panjsher Valley was the place where the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan ended,[19] it is no less important to appreciate the major role that the Panjsher played in that event's beginning.

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[19]Coll, Ghost Wars, pp. 108-111; Crile, Charlie Wilson's War, pp. 197-202.

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